

Stellantis cutting hundreds of jobs at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant

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We want to hear from you: Fill out the form below to tell us what you think about the job cuts at Stellantis and the conditions at your plant.

Stellantis plans to cut hundreds of jobs at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) by June, according to a video posted by United Auto Workers Local 1700 last Friday. Nearly 6,500 workers currently work at the suburban Detroit plant where they build the company's highly profitable Ram 1500 pickups.

In the video, UAW officials say nothing about mobilizing workers in a struggle to stop the layoffs. On the contrary, the local bureaucrats spend the bulk of their time arrogantly lecturing workers and blaming them for supposedly slacking off on the line, parroting management's lying justifications for the job cuts.

UAW Local 1700 President Charles Bell begins by saying the local's plant committee was called into an emergency meeting with management early last week and told that 408 jobs would be cut. This would lead to an undisclosed number of permanent layoffs at the plant, Bell said, adding, "Layoffs are serious, especially when you got layoffs at Trenton Engine, Belvidere, and, from what we were told in the (UAW) council meeting, several other locations."

The UAW shop chairman, Theron Jackson, said management was also unilaterally changing sickness and accident (S & A) policies to justify the firing of workers on medical leave. He then declared, "It's up to us to draw a line in the sand and protect our jobs. They clearly are drawing a line against us and are willing to fire each and every one of us."

Despite the rhetoric, the Local 1700 officials did not propose a single action to defend workers. On the contrary, they were preoccupied with preventing workers from doing anything that would disrupt the company's production and profits.

Vice President Mike Spencer acknowledged that workers were ready to take matters in their own hands and pointed to the wildcat strikes that SHAP and other workers carried out in March 2020 as COVID-19 spread through the plants,

forcing the shutdown of the auto industry. The "actions started on the floor," he admitted, before falsely claiming that "the leadership stood behind them."

Aware that workers were discussing such actions again, Spencer said, "When you make those actions, if these actions are deemed to be necessary, make sure you are doing it within the bounds of what the contract says." In other words, management can ignore the terms of the contract all it wants, but workers have no right to collectively fight, according to Spencer, because it would be a "violation of the contract."

Desiree Slater, the Local 1700 committeewoman in the Trim Department, then blamed the workers themselves for the job cuts. "Stop helping them cut our jobs," she said, before ordering workers, "Don't walk up and down the line, and no more phones and iPads."

Ricky Odum, the committeeman in the body shop, added, "Those of you that are not doing what's right—we challenge you to switch directions. Job cuts are coming so fast."

The local officials acknowledged that they were deeply hated by workers on the shop floor. "Stop saying that the union is nothing," Slater complained, adding, "Every day, we are fighting for you behind closed doors." Odum added, "We are not the problem. A lot of things are done to make it look like your union is not fighting for you, but those things are designed to create divisions and get people questioning the integrity of the union. I'm asking you to fight with us, not against us."

Local President Bell admitted that he was prepared to lecture workers about "unplanned absenteeism" during a town hall meeting last week. It is apparent, however, that he and other local officials thought it would be better to inform workers about the layoffs in the safety of a YouTube video rather than show up for a mass meeting of angry workers.

The brazenly pro-management character of Local 1700's response to the job cuts has provoked heated opposition by workers, which the local leadership have sought to crudely censor and suppress. In posts before and after the video on its "UAW Local 1700 Worker 2 Worker" Facebook page,

unnamed officials declared their hostility to any critical comments by workers.

On Thursday, the page posted, “FYI ... Please refrain from commenting on the shared information because there is NOBODY to go back and forth with. This is SHARED information ONLY. Thank you!”

On Friday, shortly after the video was posted, the local declared, “FYI ... OUR DELETE AND BLOCK BUTTON ARE ACTIVE! GOOD DAY!”

SHAP workers were quick to denounce the attack on jobs and the collusion of the UAW bureaucracy. “It’s contract time and they are trying to threaten us again,” a SHAP worker with 20 years at the company told the WSWS. “The corporations care more about their products than the people who build them. As for the union officials, you can never find them when you need them and your calls to the union office never go through.”

Responding to the union official’s complaint about workers using their phones in the plant, he continued, “We have families too and if we’re on the phone we’re dealing with sick kids or some other family emergency. We know these jobs and can multi-task if we need to. Quality issues are not caused by people on their phones. It’s management telling workers to push through vehicles no matter what the defects.

“With the contract coming up a lot of workers feel an urgency to strike. We want to get back what we lost. The companies have been making billions. There is an uproar over the cost of living. Food, health insurance, gas is going up and up, and we are paying more and getting less. We need to get back COLA, and overtime after eight hours a day, instead of 40 hours a week. I’ve lost \$25,000 to \$30,000 in overtime payments because of the changes.

“The SEs [supplemental or temporary employees] work an eight-hour shift and then they are told at the last minute to work another shift. They have families too. They can’t just turn off and back on like a robot. Now they are going after workers on medical leave, even though we’ve paid for it, and firing them.”

“I’ve already got two stents in my heart from this place,” another veteran worker said, “and they don’t want guys going to medical for chest pains. They complain about workers having phones and radios, but they don’t even have sanitizer anymore or functioning water coolers for the workers building the trucks. As for absenteeism, they’re paying more at McDonald’s for new workers. The company took away COLA and even for the most senior workers, our pay grade isn’t keeping up with the economy.”

Like GM, Ford and other global automakers, Stellantis is on a worldwide cost-cutting drive. On April 1, the company began cutting 360 jobs at the Trnava plant in the central

European country of Slovakia. The layoffs came “after negotiations with the 733 workers employed on weekend shifts, with nearly half of those employees rejecting an amended work schedule,” local news media reported.

In Italy, the company is currently working with the unions to eliminate 2,000 workers through supposedly “voluntary” layoffs. Since 2021, when Stellantis was formed through the merger of Fiat Chrysler and Peugeot maker PSA, almost 7,000 jobs have been cut in Italy.

The UAW apparatus, now led by Shawn Fain and Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD), will do nothing to fight plant closures and layoffs. In fact, the bureaucracy will welcome these attacks as a means to pressure workers to give up what Fain’s transition team calls their “unreasonable expectations” and impose yet another concessionary agreement.

But rank-and-file workers have plans of their own. On March 26, workers from GM, Stellantis, Dana, Mack Trucks and other plants gathered in Detroit and, along with workers from Caterpillar and other workplaces joining online, mapped out a strategy to defend workers’ jobs and fight for substantial improvements in wages and working conditions. Because it is impossible to fight transnational corporations in a single country, they voted to join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which is coordinating the fightback by workers across national boundaries.

The corporate terrorism of Stellantis must be fought. But this requires building up the network of rank-and-file committees to transfer decision-making power from the pro-corporate UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor.

The fight against layoffs and further plant closures requires the coordinated action of the entire UAW membership. If the companies say that less labor is needed to build electric vehicles, then workers must fight to reduce the workweek from 40 to 30 hours with no loss in pay. This must be combined with a 50 percent pay increase to make up for decades of lost wages, the restoration of COLA and the eight-hour day, the abolition of tiers, pensions for all and the immediate rollover of all SEs and TPTs.

To discuss joining the network of autoworker rank-and-file committees or forming a committee at your plant, contact us today. You can also sign up for text updates from the autoworkers rank-and-file committee network by texting AUTO to (866) 847-1086.



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