

Warren Truck workers denounce layoffs at Stellantis Sterling Heights plant

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Are you an autoworker? We want to hear from you: Fill out the form at the end to tell us what you think about the growing attacks on jobs, and what your working conditions are like.

Workers at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit denounced the company's plans to lay off hundreds of their coworkers at the nearby Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) and have called for joint action to defend every worker's job. The Warren Truck workers spoke out against the SHAP layoffs in discussions with reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* last week.

A little over a week ago, officials from United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1700 posted a video on the local's Facebook page informing SHAP workers that management was cutting 408 jobs at the plant and demagogically declaring "we're at war" with Stellantis. Far from proposing any collective struggle to fight the layoffs, local union officials warned angry rank-and-file workers not to shut down production on their own because this would "violate the contract."

With the contracts expiring this summer for 170,000 autoworkers in the US and Canada, Stellantis and the other global automakers have embarked on a campaign of economic terror against workers. This is aimed at "softening" them up for the companies' demands for even greater concessions.

With living costs soaring and companies making billions since the pandemic began, rank-and-file workers are determined to win inflation-busting wage increases and recoup the concessions the UAW gave up during the 2009 restructuring of GM and Chrysler by the Obama administration. This includes restoring cost-of-living protections (COLA), overtime payments after eight hours, abolishing two-tier wages and benefits and putting an end to the abuse of temporary workers, also known as supplemental employees.

"I saw the video from the UAW about the SHAP layoffs," a veteran Warren Truck worker told the WSW. "They said, 'We're at war.' But where have they been all these years?

They've been bending over backwards for the company forever. SHAP workers had to walk out on their own over COVID because the union wanted to keep them in the plant. They started up the plants again and the UAW kept everything hush-hush while people were still getting sick and dying.

"It's five months before the contract expires and what is the UAW International doing? Warren Truck is the next plant that's going to be targeted. [Stellantis CEO Carlos] Tavares said production costs to build a new electric vehicle were 40 percent higher here than any other plant in North America and Europe. All they want is numbers.

"Before the 2019 contract, GM announced the closure of five plants. We lost most of the plants, including the one in Lordstown, Ohio, and the Hydra-Matic plant down the street. The UAW is always telling us, 'You have to take this, it's the best you're going to get.' But we can keep voting them down like the workers at Deere did. They're making record profits and we want good raises, COLA and good pensions for everyone. We don't want the company to do whatever they want. We won't accept what the International wants us to. The people will have to unite because now is the best time for us to get back what they've taken from us."

Weeks before Tavares visited Warren Truck, the company closed its Belvidere, Illinois assembly plant, forcing the remaining 1,300 workers to uproot their families and move hundreds of miles to keep their jobs. Earlier this year, Tavares warned that he was prepared to carry out "unpopular decisions" unless he was able to squeeze more from workers to finance the transition to electric vehicle production.

"We all have to come together as one and do something about this," another Warren Truck worker told the WSW. "We have families we have to feed. If we're not working, how can that happen? I heard about the closure of the Belvidere plant. That's unfair. They shipped all the people from Belvidere all around. But our jobs aren't secure. We got to do what we got to do to make sure that this plant and

other plants do not close.”

She denounced management’s claims about poor attendance and quality problems with the pickup trucks at the plant. “That is straight-up BS,” she said. “If they made our working conditions a whole lot better then people would want to come to work. They don’t care about us. All we are is a number to them, and they just want us to put out trucks. They are making it hard for us. I’m tired and mad as hell, so we have to do something about it.”

Another worker told the WSWS: “We aren’t being told anything about layoffs. They haven’t made any decisions on our plant yet, but layoffs are coming. They like to keep us in suspense. When Belvidere workers were transferred, everyone else was pushed down a level. They use that to divide us. I was a TPT for four years before they finally rolled me over.”

The worker rejected the lie “that there is not enough money” to provide workers with secure and good-paying jobs. Pointing to the broader issues behind the attack on workers, he said, “Why should they be spending trillions of dollars of our money for the war in Ukraine? The problem is, the US isn’t the world power anymore. Now the value of the dollar is being kept down to lower our wages. Gas has gone up and it’s expensive for me to drive to work every day all the way from Port Huron [52 miles away].”

Another newly hired worker added: “My very first day here was when Tavares came. You could say it was a trial by fire. We were thinking after that that the job cuts that they made at SHAP would be coming here, the way they were talking. It still could.”

Another worker referred to the newly elected UAW president, Shawn Fain, who is now in charge of the UAW apparatus. Fain won with the votes of less than 6 percent of over a million active and retired members, in an election marred by the deliberate disenfranchisement of UAW members by the union bureaucracy, with the collusion of the court-appointed UAW Monitor.

“Nothing is different with Fain,” the worker said, adding, “They’re in bed with the company.”

The WSWS has received reports that all TPT/SEs at the Dundee plant were laid off earlier this month and given nothing but a cookie and t-shirt. “How is the union allowing this? Thought the whole point of a union was to keep our jobs and make sure we are treated fairly,” one worker posted on a Facebook page for TPTs at the Toledo Jeep plant. “Since Stellantis took over, they have done nothing but tear us apart, eliminating jobs, closing plants and in creating an even bigger wedge between full-timers and SEs. I’d love to hear something (anything) from our union about this. Right now, it doesn’t even seem like management knows what the company is doing.”

In his remarks to the UAW Special Bargaining Convention last month, the new UAW vice president for the Stellantis Department, Rich Boyer, who was previously the UAW Local 140 Shop Chairman at the Warren Truck Plant, acknowledged that hundreds of jobs have already been cut at Dundee and the Trenton Engine plant in Michigan, and that thousands more jobs were threatened at Toledo Jeep, the Toledo Machining plant, and in Trenton, Dundee and Kokomo, Indiana. In a demagogic burst he declared, “We have to stand together. We are going to walk the line with you, we are going to do whatever we have to do to make sure you survive.”

The UAW bureaucracy has once again declared that “securing new domestic production” will be its priority in the upcoming negotiations. This only means that Fain and the UAW apparatus are willing to hand over even more concessions, including a new lower tier of wages and benefits at electric battery factories, in the name of “securing jobs.” Far from mobilizing workers to fight the economic blackmail from the auto corporations, the UAW bureaucracy welcomes the job cuts as a means of battering down what Fain’s transition team calls the “unreasonable expectations” of the workers.

While the companies and the UAW bureaucracy may have their plans, rank-and-file workers are organizing to fight for what they need. In recent months, autoworkers have joined the growing network of rank-and-file committees in the auto factories, which are fighting to transfer decision making and power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor. These committees, whose work is being coordinated globally by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), are laying the groundwork for a powerful counteroffensive by workers to defend the jobs and livelihoods of all workers.

The campaign of Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman, who won nearly 5,000 votes in the first round of the UAW elections, has demonstrated that there is widespread support for a real fight. Because electric vehicles require less labor to produce, Lehman has called for workers to fight for reduction of the workweek to 30 hours, with no loss of pay, to defend all workers’ jobs. “We must organize together on the shop floors of all plants internationally in rank-and-file committees to ready a fight against parasites like Tavares,” Lehman told the WSWS last month. “We will not win waiting on the UAW apparatus to fight for us.”



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