

Mobilize all autoworkers to fight plant closures and mass layoffs! Defend the right to every job!

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
24 April 2023

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls for coordinated action by all United Auto Workers members and the building of rank-and-file committees in every factory to stop plant closings and mass layoffs.

In recent weeks, thousands of workers at Stellantis factories in the United States have been hit by job cuts, including 1,350 workers at the assembly plant in Belvidere, Illinois, that was closed at the end of February. Hundreds of workers at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) and the Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit, along with Jeep workers at the Toledo Assembly Complex in northern Ohio, are also being laid off in the coming weeks.

At the UAW Special Bargaining Convention last month, newly elected Vice President Rich Boyer, who will lead this summer's talks with Stellantis, admitted that the company is planning far more cuts. Additional layoffs are threatened, he said, at the Toledo complex, the nearby Toledo Machining Plant and engine and transmission plants in Dundee and Trenton, Michigan, and Kokomo, Indiana. Boyer did not reveal how many jobs were on the chopping block, but as many as 4,200 workers could be pushed out in the coming months through early retirement buyouts and "voluntary quits," according to some local union officials.

The UAW bureaucracy under President Shawn Fain has not proposed a single concrete action to oppose these attacks. On the contrary, a message sent by UAW Local 140 officials to Warren Truck workers said Stellantis executives requested the "union's input in a cost-cutting plan."

The job cuts are not limited to Stellantis. At the end of 2022, Ford shuttered its engine plant in Romeo, Michigan, which once employed 1,300 workers. The company has also refused to designate a new product for the Chicago Assembly Plant, threatening the jobs of over 4,000 workers there and thousands more at adjacent stamping and parts plants. Beyond the US, Ford, Stellantis and other automakers are slashing jobs while pitting workers in a fratricidal competition to accept cost cuts in return for illusory promises of new EV product investments.

But these job cuts are only the opening salvo. The global automakers are accelerating plans for a massive downsizing internationally as the industry transitions to electric vehicle (EV) production. The companies intend to exploit the simpler design of

EVs—which require fewer parts and less than half the labor hours to produce than vehicles with internal combustion engines (ICE)—to destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs in the pursuit of greater profits. Late last year, Ford CEO Jim Farley said making EVs would require 40 percent fewer workers, and "storm clouds" were coming.

To profit in the brutally competitive EV market against the current dominant players, including Tesla and China's growing domestic manufacturers, the traditional North American and European automakers must slash labor costs to the bare minimum. "If we don't optimize our cost structure, we cannot absorb the additional cost of electrification," Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares told reporters at the beginning of the year. He added that more "unpopular decisions will have to be made."

If not stopped, the destruction of nearly half the jobs in the auto industry would be a social catastrophe for cities like Detroit, Toledo, Flint, Cleveland and others, which have already suffered from decades of corporate deindustrialization. It would result in more poverty, school closings, abandoned homes, drug addiction, suicides and other tragedies.

But autoworkers are in no mood to accept any further attacks on their jobs and living standards. After seeing their co-workers and family members die throughout the pandemic and suffering a devastating loss in real income due to decades-high inflation rates, 140,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers in the US and another 20,000 in Canada are determined to win substantial gains when their contracts expire in mid-September. Workers want inflation-busting raises, the restoration of cost-of-living protections, the abolition of the two-tier wage system, fully paid pensions and health care benefits for all for workers and retirees and an end to the industrial servitude of temporary workers. Hundreds of thousands more workers in the parts, truck manufacturing, aerospace, agricultural and construction equipment industries share the same sentiment.

The UAW bureaucracy is fully aware of the threatened jobs bloodbath and is deliberately concealing it from rank-and-file workers. In comments to the Automotive Press Association last week, Fain told reporters that he has been in touch with the auto executives and declared, "I want to work with the companies. I want to have a good relationship." He then blustered, "But if they're not going to treat our members with respect and give them

their due, then we're going to have issues."

The chief concern of Fain and the rest of the UAW apparatus is containing the explosive opposition of rank-and-file workers. The only "demand" the UAW bureaucracy will make at the bargaining table is that it be allowed to help the auto bosses manage this transition, including by "retraining" tens of thousands of laid off workers for EV production and then supplying them to the automakers at half rate. As a reward, the UAW will continue to collect dues from brutally exploited workers at places such as the GM-LG Chem joint venture in Ohio where UAW members make \$16.50 and top out at \$20. "There is no reason they can't form a joint venture with us," Fain declared.

The Biden administration has enacted new tax subsidies, principally benefiting GM and Ford, to boost the production of EVs whose materials are "sourced" from the US and some of its "allies." This is not because the White House has suddenly embraced environmentalism. Instead, it is part of the broader struggle by American big business to corner the EV market against its Asian and European rivals.

At the same time, the Biden administration wants the US to control the rare earth metals and other raw materials, now largely located or processed in China and Russia. This is a central issue in the US-NATO war against Russia and the plans for war against China. Hundreds of thousands have already been killed in the war over Ukraine, and the US and NATO powers are planning a further escalation, which could lead to the exchange of nuclear weapons.

The White House has made it clear to the employers that they should bring the UAW in to police the workers in the new EV plants and promote "Buy American" chauvinism against workers in other countries.

Fain and his Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) faction was brought in by the Biden administration to provide a facelift to the corrupt and hated UAW bureaucracy. His administration was installed through a rigged election that effectively disenfranchised 90 percent of the members. Far from opposing the attack on jobs, Fain & Co. welcome it as a means of suppressing what his transition teams calls "the unreasonable expectations" of autoworkers and imposing another sellout contract in the name of "saving jobs."

But the nearly 5,000 votes won by Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and UAW candidate for president in the first round of the union's national elections, shows the powerful support for the fight to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor through the expansion of the network of rank-and-file committees.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is fighting to ensure that any transition in the industry is carried out in the interests of rank-and-file workers.

If EVs require 40 percent fewer labor hours to build, then the workweek should be reduced from the exhausting 40, 50 and even 60 hours workers routinely labor to 30 hours a week, with no loss in pay. Just as wages must rise automatically with the increase in the price of consumer goods, the number of working hours must be adjusted so available work is divided among all workers with no loss in income.

Instead of mass unemployment, workers' jobs must be guaranteed. Belvidere must be reopened, and its thousands of laid off workers rehired at full pay.

The bosses and the UAW bureaucrats will howl at such a proposal. But it is based on the elementary principle that workers—whose collective labor produced the \$50 billion profits the automakers made last year—have a social right to secure and good-paying jobs.

The same week as job cut notices went out to workers in Detroit and Toledo, a Stellantis stockholder meeting voted to increase CEO Tavares' pay by 20 percent to \$25 million, and the first tranche of a \$1.6 billion stock buyback program was paid. The issue is not whether there are enough resources to meet workers' needs but rather who controls the wealth workers produce and in whose interests it is used.

The coming fight is not simply a contract struggle but an opportunity to establish working class control over jobs, hiring and firing and over production as a whole.

Many workers want to know "What are rank-and-file committees?" The answer: They are democratic organizations run by workers on the shop floor, and they are *necessary* to carry the fight forward. They share information, plan common actions and link up workers across each shift and production line so everyone is on the same page. Their goal is to unite workers across all plants and corporations, linking them together in a network that breaks down the isolation imposed by the UAW apparatus and unleashes the full strength of the entire working class. These committees at each local plant are part of our collective body, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), a worldwide organization to unite workers across national borders to defend the jobs and livelihoods of all workers.

The corporations and their UAW "partners" have their strategy to impoverish the working class and enrich themselves. But rank-and-file workers are developing their own strategy and building new centers of power in the factories to fight for it. Over the last several weeks, workers in Flint, Lansing, Detroit and at the Dana parts plant in Toledo, Ohio, have joined the growing network of committees, which is being directed by the IWA-RFC.

There is not a moment to lose. If you agree with this, set up a rank-and-file committee in your workplace. For more information and assistance, fill out the form below.

On Sunday, April 30, the IWA-RFC is co-sponsoring an international online rally to celebrate May Day, the historic day of international working class solidarity. We call on all workers to register here to attend the online rally, which will discuss the perspective and strategy to develop an international movement of the working class against corporate exploitation and war.



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