

Detroit teachers and students take their fight against layoffs to the auto plants

Zac Corrigan, Renae Cassimeda
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Attend the online meeting, “Unite the working class against layoffs and budget cuts in education!” on Saturday, June 24, hosted by the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee!

On Thursday, June 22, the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee organized a campaign during a shift change at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant just outside of Detroit.

Members of the committee, including current and former teachers and paraprofessionals, distributed hundreds of leaflets to rank-and-file autoworkers and which called for the unity of educators and autoworkers in Detroit this summer in a common fight against layoffs and cuts.

Contracts for all “Big Three” autoworkers at Stellantis, Ford and General Motors expire on September 14, and Warren Truck is one of several Stellantis plants (formerly Chrysler) which are set to go to “critical status” for 90 days starting July 5 in order to stockpile vehicles in anticipation of a strike. This means workers can be forced to work seven days a week and up to 12 hours a day.

The Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee is fighting against the imposition of “critical status” and calling for the building and the expansion of the network of rank-and-file committees in opposition to both management and pro company UAW apparatus.

Meanwhile, contracts for thousands of teachers and other workers in the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD), the largest school district in Michigan, will expire on June 30. The DPSCD school board is cutting hundreds of millions of dollars from the budget this year on behalf of the Democratic Party, which runs Detroit and which claims “there is no money” for education.

Both teachers and the autoworkers face ongoing

threats to their jobs. About one hundred DPSCD workers including paraprofessionals, nurses, and other critical support staff are being laid off this summer, while about 200 others will be forced to accept new roles.

In the auto industry, the layoffs are sparked by the switch to electric vehicle (EV) production, which requires considerably fewer man hours compared to traditional internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicle production. The companies are seeking to make workers pay for this technological advancement.

At the shift change, teachers learned about the conditions facing Detroit autoworkers, many of whom were carrying chairs and coolers of water into the plant for long shifts without proper breaks and accommodations.

“These are some hard workers!” said Kay Thomas, a Detroit music teacher. She noted both the large numbers of mostly young workers, some of them right out of high school, as well as the substantial number of workers “that look like they are past retirement age, but they still have to work. It’s heartbreaking.”

Kay is one of the hundreds of DPSCD teachers and other workers being transferred against her will as part of the budget cuts. She pointed out that in the Detroit area, there are a lot of parents who are autoworkers, as well as “a lot of households have both autoworkers and teachers. It just makes sense,” to unite them, she said.

Many autoworkers felt the same way. “Yes to uniting teachers and autoworkers!” said one Temporary Part Time (TPT) worker on her way into the plant. “We all need more money. We all need to live. Everything has gone up, food prices, insurance, gas, all of it! How do they expect you to live when it’s like this and your pay stays the same?”

When teachers explained that the laying off of

paraeducators and support staff in Detroit schools was part of the turn by districts across the country to a temporary teaching workforce in order to hire and fire at will, she said, “It’s just like us TPTs! You know it’s hard for us to work two jobs because of the hours and high demand here. They pay us less, we have absolutely no job protection, and they get away with pushing us harder because they know so many of us are desperate for work and are looking to be rolled over. Tell me how a temp worker starting at 15 an hour can make ends meet!”

A maintenance worker at the plant said, “We should absolutely unite with the teachers, and school workers too!” He spoke about the unsanitary conditions in the plant, which resemble those in the public schools. “We have had a sewage leak in the plant for over two years,” He explained. “It is in three different spots. But they won’t do anything to fix the damn thing. We just keep getting told to drain it when it gets really bad. They won’t spend the money to break up the floors and fix it.”

An autoworker with eight years said, “I agree with supporting the teachers. It’s crazy that teachers have to worry about their classroom being shot up, and now the stress of even the thought of arming teachers. At the end of the day, we are all fighting for the same thing. We all want equality, we all want safety, we all want a good paying job.”

Another worker said, “The whole thing is messed up. I’m in support of teachers and autoworkers getting together. I’ve been at this plant for a long time and this is the worst I’ve seen it. The conditions are so bad in there, with overwork and low pay for the majority of workers. They [the company] have so much money and hardly any of it goes to us [the workers].”

Jacob, a member of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at Wayne State University, also came to the auto plant to help build the rank-and-file committees. “It was a great experience being able to get in touch with the workers at the plant and learn about their grievances,” he said. “The biggest take away for me was that auto workers are extremely tired, frustrated, and fed up with their current conditions. And some of them were not even aware of the upcoming 12-hour, 7-day work week starting soon.”

“The uniting of not only auto workers through rank-

and-file committees, but teachers as well, will serve as means to oppose the worsening conditions facing all workers,” he said. The IYSSE fights to turn students and young people toward the international working class in order to fight for socialism and equality.

To join the fight to build rank-and-file committees to unite the working class, fill out the form at wsws.org/workers.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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