

“I build Dodge trucks selling for \$70,000 and can’t afford to fix my own car”: Detroit temporary part-time worker speaks on contract battle and impact of UAW concessions

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Hannah is a young temporary part-time (TPT) worker at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit whose grandfather and great-grandfather worked at the plant. She recently spoke with the World Socialist Web Site about her life as a TPT and the issues at stake in the current contract battle. Her name has been changed to protect her identity.

Join the next online public meeting this Sunday, September 10, at 3:00 p.m. Eastern. Register here to attend.

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When I first started at the plant, I thought this was going to be great opportunity to obtain benefits and create a better life for my child and myself. I thought if I could just make it to full-time, it would be better. I knew I would have my struggles and it wouldn’t be perfect, but I didn’t know it would be like this.

The full-time workers are being screwed over too and have lost a lot. After thirty years, they’re afraid to retire because they don’t know if they’ll be able to survive. I see older workers hobbling in the plant whose bodies are so beat up they can hardly walk. I know a worker who has maxed out at top pay and has worked eight additional years for this company without receiving any pay increase.

But TPTs are treated even worse.

I take pride in perfect attendance with Stellantis and have never missed a day. But I haven’t been rolled over to full-time and I have not received any information on when that may occur. I heard talk that maybe 500 TPTs are going to get rolled over. But I’m sure we have more than 500 TPTs in the plant and being that everything is seniority based, I would not be included in that.

There are workers who have been part-timers for years. A TPT maxes out at top pay after four years and it’s under \$20 an hour. Why does it even have to be like that? Why can’t we all just get rolled over?

The Belvidere workers lost their jobs and they’ve been shipped over to our plant and others. I know a young worker who lived in Illinois and came to Michigan when the plant closed. As a Stellantis employee, this person has no family here and is living out of a hotel. Because of inflation and everything that is all they can afford. The housing market is insane! It’s truly heartbreaking.

With this company, it doesn’t matter how loyal you are to them or how determined or how well you work, that’s not what this is about. They don’t care about that. That doesn’t really amount to anything, to be

honest.

Life as a TPT

I had serious issues with my car and it was down for a significant amount of time. It ended up costing me almost \$1,000 to get it up and driving again. Unfortunately, I could not drive it. Fortunately, I was able to get back and forth from work thanks to a very kind co-worker. I couldn’t afford a Lyft or Uber, and I definitely couldn’t afford a taxi. I wouldn’t attempt to take a bus due to the unreliability. If I had been late or missed a shift, I could have lost my job. I would’ve been left without a vehicle or a job.

I told someone the other day, it makes me mad because every day I come in here I’m building Dodge trucks that sell for \$60-70,000 each and with me only making \$15.78, I can’t even afford to fix my own car.

The predicament I was in is very prevalent. I know a TPT who has been there for a little over two years. He has two jobs. He’ll work at Stellantis all day, leaves and heads to his other job. I asked him, “How do you sleep?” And he just said, “Oh, well, when I can.” We have a dangerous job. If you’re not alert you could get very hurt, it could be fatal. So, there’s a lot of TPTs like that. Some of them are working two or three jobs. I’ve done that in the past, but I don’t have the energy to do that anymore, to be honest.

There’s a lot of us TPTs who are just barely getting by. We can’t even say we’re living paycheck to paycheck because sometimes it’s multiple paychecks from different jobs. I have to prioritize which bills are most important. I can’t pay all my bills every month. Rent, obviously, is number one, because if I don’t have a place to live where are me and my child going to be? Next most important is car insurance because I need it to drive. After those, then I pay electric, gas, groceries, whatever. I don’t have enough money every month. I had to get money from a friend last week to buy groceries for my child, and I’m still \$50 behind on rent. That’s where I’m at.

I went to the pharmacy and wasn’t able to pick up my medication. I told the pharmacist she might as well put my prescriptions back because I don’t know when I’ll be able to pick them up. I can’t afford the copays. I can barely afford to pay for the essentials.

The UAW bureaucracy's treatment of TPTs

The thing that really sucks is, while we the workers are all struggling like this, all the union bureaucrats, they still bring home their same paychecks. They try to say things like, "Oh, I understand." But we know they don't. They're going on vacation, going on trips, doing this, doing that, just bought a boat. Meanwhile I can't even buy groceries. Shawn Fain said, "We're all just scraping by." Oh, yeah? If we're all just scraping by, why don't you hand out some money then and help out? I heard a UAW president makes around \$300,000 a year.

I've seen it in the plant. The union bureaucrats are all buddy-buddy with management. They hang out with each other all the time. You see them side-by-side walking together, laughing together, chopping it up. I thought that wasn't supposed to be how it is. Isn't that a conflict of interest? Because how are you, in your right mind, going to stand up for a worker when you're buddy-buddy with management? You're going to side with management, of course. So, what are we paying union dues for? The full-timers pay \$75. We're only paying \$25 less and we're not even fully protected!

If you try to file a grievance, the union reps act like you're inconveniencing them. I once brought a rep with me into a meeting with management but he was on the phone the whole time. I did all the talking, which is fine, but then it's like, what are you doing here? What's the point? Are you getting paid for this because what did you even do? You did nothing. The way this rep talks to people is very belittling, calling them idiots, calling them stupid.

If you try to stand up for yourself, they paint you as being disrespectful. They put a target on you. They told me I needed to be low-key because I had a "reputation." I said, "A reputation from what? For being a good employee?!" I've never missed a day of work. I've never been late. You can put me on any job. I don't complain about it. So, what do I have a reputation for? For defending myself as a human being? I'm difficult, I guess, because I don't just sit there and take that type of abuse.

I was told by a team leader, "Hannah, you need to remember you are the TPT." I said, "I don't care if I'm a TPT. Right is right, wrong is wrong."

Uniting across tiers

It doesn't add up, what they say about TPTs, because they need us when full-timers don't come in. They need us when they need people to stay over, and full-timers don't want to. We work those shifts. But then they talk to us like we're nothing, yet they literally need us.

It's management and the UAW bureaucrats that implement and allow these divisions. If you talk to the full-timers, they don't agree with them at all. If we workers had a vote that was seriously taken into proper consideration, things would not be how they are. They try to make it out like the full-timers don't care, but that's just not true. They do care, and they hate the tiers just like we TPTs do.

This whole system was set up to be against the people. It isn't designed for us and that is evident.

The September contract battle

This corruption stuff with the UAW has been going on forever, and it's all intertwined. The UAW is working together with the company behind our backs. We don't even know what goes on. I believe in fighting for what's right and trying to fight for what we deserve, but I am not okay with people fighting and standing up, and then still getting the short end of the stick. This needs to be a fight that we are going to win.

People want to go out on strike. But they don't want to go on strike and make this big sacrifice if they're going to be sold out like the Clarios battery workers in Toledo. If we strike, we want to win.

We want to get things back like decent insurance, and no more tiers. We also want back all the other things that the UAW gave up. What a lot of people that are not involved with the automotive industry don't understand, is we used to have these things in the past. We're essentially fighting for the bare minimum back. These are trillion-dollar companies and they can more than afford it. All these companies want is profit, profit, profit and to take it all at our expense. But it's not theirs it's ours.

Even if they come to a negotiation, I feel like a strike is necessary to show them we mean business. I think it should be all of us on strike at one time. That's going to definitely have more of an impact. This whole economy is going to crap, and if we don't do something about it, it's just going to continue. I read something that said people should be bringing in, at least at a minimum, like \$90,000 a year just to get by. Not to be comfortable, but to just survive. But the average American manufacturing worker is bringing in anywhere less than \$40,000. That's not even half of what you need to be able to get by now.

I think this whole system was not designed for the people. It's designed for profit. However, the rich can get it, any which way, it's to no end. That's how the world is designed: to keep the rich rich, and the poor poor.

I think building the rank-and-file committees is a good way for people to come together and really establish what is in the best interest of us workers as a whole. Most of my information I get comes from the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, honestly, because the UAW doesn't tell us anything inside the plant. They can't even tell us how long we're working on a given day, do you really think they're going to tell us anything about this contract? Absolutely not! Everything is hush-hush. It's all a big secret, yet we work for this company and pay dues to the UAW.

So, I say let's strike until it's right. Meaning that we're going to stand up for ourselves until the contract is right. No matter how long that's going to take, we need to stand in unity because there's more power in numbers. We need to stand together and unify, that's what the union's supposed to be. And we need to stand out there and do what we need to do until we win what is right. We have to stand strong. There's no other way. That's it.

We're all struggling as it is now anyway, so why not struggle a little more for a better outcome? Because that's the goal, that's the big picture. Otherwise, what are we doing? What's the point? In my generation, we just want some security. We're not talking about getting rich, we're talking about being able to meet our basic needs because most of us are not able to, not with the wages that we're at now.

The rich are staying rich at our expense. They are literally working us into the ground. They don't look at us as people. They utilize us for profit and that's it. They don't care about us at all. They care about what's going into their pocket. What it all comes down to is who has control. So, unless we stand up, it's always going to be like that. Nothing is going to change unless we fight for it.

For more information on joining rank-and-file committees at Warren Truck and other plants, fill out the form below.



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