

Temp workers face increasingly precarious position as UAW non-strike continues

Shannon Jones
9 October 2023

Many temporary workers at the Detroit Three are facing layoff or the severe reduction in hours as the auto companies impose production cuts as UAW President Shawn Fain's bogus "stand up" strike continues into its fourth week.

The reported decision by General Motors to discharge all temp workers at the Lake Orion Assembly Plant north of Detroit last Friday highlights the direct attacks management is carrying out against the workforce with the evident aims of creating divisions and undermining solidarity. Workers at many other facilities have reported the sharp cutback in hours and last-minute schedule changes impacting mostly temp workers.

At the Detroit Assembly Complex-Jefferson Plant, many temp workers, now called supplementals, were reportedly laid off as of last week. Jefferson had been one of several large Detroit area assembly plants that had been on "critical status" since July with mandatory 7-day work schedules. The brutal work schedule, implemented with the tacit agreement of the UAW, allowed Stellantis to build up inventory of many of its more profitable vehicles ahead of a potential strike.

According to a full-time Lake Orion worker who contacted the WSWS, GM "let go of 52 temps, all the temps we had" on Friday. "Today was the first day without them. We ran terrible," he added. The plant currently builds electric vehicles, including the Chevrolet Bolt.

World Socialist Web Site reporters at Jefferson Assembly encountered anger among temp workers. Some said they had been scheduled, unscheduled, rescheduled, and got only one day of work that Saturday. A worker said she showed up to work and her badge was deactivated because she had been taken off the schedule.

A similar situation was reported by supplementals at

the Warren Truck Assembly Plant. One supplemental said this was the second week she had not been scheduled in.

Another supplemental at Warren Truck Assembly Plant said she had only been scheduled for one day. "I am extremely disappointed that the company would intentionally treat their employees this way. No matter what their status is, supplemental or full-time, we are all employees to this company. This negotiation has really shown the world a lot about the kind of character these people hold.

"I believe the UAW is being paid off by the company and that they aren't in solidarity with us the way that they would like us to believe they are," she concluded.

A supplemental at the Stellantis Sterling Height Assembly Plant, another of the Detroit-area plants that has been on critical status, told the WSWS, "We don't even really know if we have a job or not. I know that it varies from plant to plant and some places always have work.

"It's not right that people are available to work and the companies aren't even offering job security or proper benefits to us like what used to be the standard."

Asked about the "stand up" strike policy by the UAW, the worker said that everything the union was doing so far seemed to be "in consideration of the companies' bottom line."

Expressing the fear and divisions being sown by the UAW bureaucracy, which treats temp workers with utter contempt and disregard, another supplemental said she wondered if she would even have a job if workers went on strike. "Even if our plant goes on strike, couldn't they just hire other people at this point? I'm not a lawyer or anything, but I was under the impression that a part-time worker going on strike is the same as quitting. So I don't know what's worse:

waiting or striking.”

In response to the enormous anger building up among Detroit-area Stellantis workers over the mistreatment of temp workers, the United Auto Workers officials and local Detroit Democratic Party office holders hastily convened a rally Sunday in a park near the Detroit Assembly Complex-Mack and Jefferson plants. The rally, ostensibly called to support temp workers, was aimed at defusing anger at the refusal of the UAW to expand the strike.

In any event, the rally only drew a few dozen full-time and part-time autoworkers, outside of union officials. Among those present was UAW Vice President for Stellantis Rick Boyer and Detroit City Council President Mary Sheffield.

A number of workers attending the rally expressed eagerness to see the strike expanded to all auto plants. A supplemental worker at Jefferson said he had been working steadily for three years at Stellantis and was still waiting to be made full-time. “We don’t get the profit sharing, the bonus, and only minimum healthcare.

“I have been doing the same job every day for three years. Sixty hours a week, and I am not full-time? That doesn’t make sense. The guy right next to me is making double my money, profit sharing, bonuses. Am I not equal?

“I say shut them all down,” he said, when told that the Autoworker Rank-and-File Committees Network was calling for an all-out strike against the Big Three automakers. “Have them all come out. Right now, I feel like a scab. We are still working, making money for the company, and my other peers are striking right now.”

Another supplemental said, ‘It’s madness how differently we are treated. We have bills to pay too. You don’t know from week to week if they are going to schedule you.’ A third added, “You’re not scheduled and you’re afraid to file for unemployment because they might fire you for job abandonment. I was off all last week. Then they told me to come in Friday and when I got to the gate my badge didn’t work. They took me off the schedule without telling me in advance.’

During the Sunday event, one UAW rep in effect blamed temp workers for part of their current plight. “When we survey you for the contract demands next time, don’t just say ‘we need more roll overs.’ Say

you want improvements in the S1 agreement that involves work schedules.’

Supplementals pointed out that, due to the reduction in hours, many supplementals would earn more on the weekly UAW strike benefit of \$500 a week than their wages or state unemployment benefits.

It should be recalled that the Canadian auto union, Unifor, cynically used the plight of temporary workers to obtain a dubious ratification of the sellout deal at Ford by a razor thin 54 percent last month. The underhanded scheming by the Unifor apparatus included sending last minute e-mails to temp workers urging them to vote yes, using as an enticement for these low-paid, superexploited workers, a one-time signing bonus.

The attacks on supplemental workers must be opposed by every UAW member and the demand raised for an all-out strike and the increasing of strike pay to \$750 a week. All temps who have been laid off or had hours cut should get full strike pay! To fight for these demands, workers should build and expand the network of rank-and-file committees. These committees, democratically run by workers themselves, aim to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shop floor.

To join this rank-and-file movement, fill out the form below. Text AUTO to (866) 847-1086 to get text updates.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact