

“We’re fighting for our lives”: Warren Truck workers turning against UAW-Stellantis deal

Jerry White

9 November 2023

Sign up for text message updates on the Detroit Three contract fight by texting AUTO to (866) 847-1086.

Nearly 4,000 workers at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly plant are scheduled to vote on a UAW-backed agreement on Monday, November 13. As more details are revealed, workers at the suburban Detroit factory have increasingly leaned towards voting “no” on the four-and-half-year proposed deal.

The factory, where workers build the Dodge Ram 1500 Classic and Jeep Wagoneer models, has large numbers of temporary part-time (TPT) workers, including single parents struggling to survive on poverty-level pay while facing unpredictable schedules. The UAW bureaucracy is preying on the economic insecurity of these workers by promises of pay raises, signing bonuses, and the conversion of TPTs to full-time positions if they vote for the deal. But many TPTs have turned against the deal on learning that less than 2,000 temps will be converted within 90 days of ratification and that the nine-month rollover period can be extended with the agreement of the UAW.

So-called “legacy” workers, who have only gotten a few dollars in pay raises over the last twenty years, are angry over the 25 percent pay raise over the life of the agreement, and the inadequate cost-of-living formula, which will do nothing to protect them against record inflation. Second-tier workers hired in after 2007 are also angry that UAW President Shawn Fain dropped their demands for the restoration of company paid pensions and retiree health benefits.

Fain, President Biden and the corporate media have hailed the deals at Stellantis and other automakers as “historic contracts.” In fact, they will pave the way for a massive assault on jobs as the industry transitions to electric vehicle production. However, the contracts preserve the position of the UAW bureaucracy as an

enforcer of management’s dictates in the plants.

Warren Truck workers who attended the “contract informational meetings” at the UAW Local 140 hall Wednesday spoke out against the tentative contract in comments to *World Socialist Web Site* reporters.

“The union officials passed out the highlights of the deal, but they weren’t talking about everything the company took,” a second-tier worker and member of the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee told the WSWS. “They kept saying, ‘Our team worked so hard. This is the best deal we got in 20 years.’ They threatened workers, saying, ‘If you vote this down, you’re going to be on the picket line for a long, cold winter.’ They were so arrogant, and you got the feeling that no matter how we voted they were going to tamper with the ballots and announce that it passed.

“I don’t care about their signing bonuses and getting a voucher to lease a Chrysler vehicle. We are fighting for our lives. I’m voting this down and I hope other workers will too. All the most important things are left out.

“They’re saying this is the best thing since sliced bread, but they aren’t telling us about the thousands of job cuts that are coming. They’re closing plants and parts distribution centers and it’s not cool that they’re going to uproot people, especially the single moms who don’t have any help and have a hard enough time getting to work now.

“They want the TPTs to get excited about being rolled over. But the company is going to lay off or fire these workers before they ever get rolled over. They’re also messing with us using FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act) to get time off. That’s regulated by the government; how can the company dictate that?

“If this doesn’t pass, the local officials said we’ll be on strike. I don’t want to stand on the picket line in the

cold, but if that's what it takes, so be it. I felt so guilty going to work while the workers at Jeep and other plants were on strike. We are all in this together and when one plant goes out, we all need to strike."

Fearing the deal might be defeated, UAW Vice President Rich Boyer met with members on Tuesday after "hearing grumblings over the deal," NBC-affiliate Click on Detroit reported. "Everybody thinks we took the first offer on the table. Just to be clear with you, there were 11 offers and 11 counteroffers—in total 22 passes across the table—before we got to this point," Boyer said. The local news outlet said that despite Boyer's comments, "Still, some members are unhappy that the UAW couldn't get the Big Three automakers to budge on a return to pensions or a shorter work week."

"One of things that I am most concerned about is that the raises take place over the life of the contract, and you won't be at full pay until 2028," the Warren Truck worker continued. "You have a lot of people with 27-28 years who are about to retire, who have never reaped the benefits of that full payment. They were the ones who took the sacrifice and gave up everything back in 2009. I feel they should get the full pay at ratification instead of four years from now. So now you're going to have to work over your required years to reap the benefits. That just sucks to me."

"I'm also really concerned about the EV thing. I didn't know if this would take off, but I know it's the future. Listening to the UAW officials, they say workers will be protected. But it's not like they're going to tell you your jobs are going to get cut. I thought these new EV battery plants were going to be just part of Chrysler and it would be equivalent to any other plant. But now I'm learning that the wages are going to be \$26 an hour. Wow."

"We asked for full COLA, retirement benefits and pensions back. It doesn't seem like we got a whole lot back. I want to see the TPTs get rolled over. I want to see everybody who is laid off come back to work. We should get at least 30 percent and pensions because we lost it and they're making record profits."

"I'm ready for the fight. It's going to take a battle because they don't want to give us anything. You've got to take whatever you want. We have to demand it. This 'stand up' strike wasn't a real fight. They told us at the beginning of the year to save our money because

we're going to strike. And then, they called a few plants out and it's kind of like, 'This about the best we can get.' But the best we can get is what we demand."

The worker also expressed his revulsion and anger over the Biden administration's backing of the Israeli genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza. Will Lehman, a striking Mack Trucks worker and candidate for UAW president last year, has issued a call demanding that the UAW halt the production of weapons being sent to Israel and that all workers in such plants be paid full pay from the profits of the giant defense contractors.

"We've seen this for decades. It's the Israeli occupation and they are terrorizing these people and Gaza is like a prison. If you treat people like that, what do you think the outcome is going to be? Poverty is a form of violence. Israel's restrictions on the Palestinian people is a form of violence. When people are suffering, they are going to tear things up. The US is just feeding weapons to Israel and all over the globe. I agree, workers should take action to stop that."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact