

Victimized Stellantis temp worker speaks on lessons of 2023 contract struggle

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24 November 2023

A young temp worker at the Stellantis Detroit Assembly Complex—Mack plant spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* about the 2023 contract struggle and his experiences. His name has been changed to prevent further victimization.

New contracts covering 146,000 workers at the Detroit Three automakers have taken effect following the announcement of ratification, over significant opposition, by the United Auto Workers leadership. More than 35,000 workers opposed the contracts, including 47 percent of production workers at General Motors.

The deals fulfilled none of the popular demands raised by the UAW prior to the contract negotiations. Many workers undoubtedly voted for the contract because they lacked any confidence in the UAW leadership's ability and willingness to wage a genuine fight.

Doug said, "I was at Stellantis for two years, a temp the whole time. While [UAW President] Shawn Fain was hitting a couple plants a week, we were working almost every day. It was mostly temps running the whole plant."

Doug said he saw many temp workers fired ahead of the ratification during the phony "stand up strike" called by Fain. The strike hit only a handful of plants while keeping the most profitable plants like Mack running throughout.

Management had a clear incentive to discharge as many temp workers as possible to avoid paying the ratification bonus and promoting eligible workers to full time status. Management's task was made easier by the "stand up strike," which forced workers at Mack and other major Detroit Three plants to remain on the job, working without a contract.

"They didn't want to roll any of us over." Doug said.

"They definitely took too long [to settle the contract with the 'stand up strike']. It was peeving a lot of people. They were picking people out who they were going to fire, who they knew were going to get full benefits."

In October, in the midst of the contract struggle, he and another worker got walked out over a trivial infraction. "We voted for a strike at the end of September, and a couple of weeks later they let me go. It has happened to others when they were ready to be rolled over.

"I said our team leader could back up our story. They [management] made up a whole bunch of stuff—'That's not what we heard. We are not playing any games; we are going to fire you.' We didn't have time to even explain our story.

"Our UAW steward signed off on it like it was nothing. They didn't have a valid reason for why they were going to let us go. The steward sat there and went along with the whole thing; like there was something in it for him. I called all through October, and they gave me the same runaround.

"At that point you might as well not have a union, because they didn't back us up. They didn't try. What are you guys actually doing? One tiny incident. No appeal, nothing.

"I put two years into the company, and then they let me go over the littlest thing. It is a shame that people go in thinking they can make a career, and the UAW is that selfish and greedy."

Doug said the experience opened his eyes. "Growing up in the area I always said I was going to work there one day," he said of the Stellantis assembly plant on Mack Avenue, the first new auto plant built in Detroit in decades. "I drove by there every day and watched them pour concrete. I finally get in and tries to make a

career, I stuck with it, and this happens. I get the short end of the stick.

“I thought I could make a career out of it, one day retire from there. It is sad to see firsthand how they treat employees. The people on top, who are not there on the floor, give you a nice little speech. ‘We are all family. We look out for one another. You can build a career here.’ They have a good speech, but the reality is they just need some workers to work for low pay and no benefits while their pockets get fat. They are living in luxury. Meanwhile, everyone else is scraping the ground for a penny or two.”

He said he had seen that during the COVID pandemic when Stellantis kept the plant open, running at full tilt as workers got sick and died. “Those cars are that important that you are risking people’s lives to get those vehicles out. I am pretty sure they were at home. They will do anything, as long as it is to their benefit.

“It’s sad, but I am glad that I learned that first hand.”

Doug said he had not heard there had been a direct membership election last year for UAW officers. The election had been ordered by the federal monitor overseeing the UAW following the corruption scandal that had sent about one dozen UAW officers to prison. The WSWS explained that rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman had run for UAW president calling the abolition of the bureaucracy and putting power in the hands of workers on the shop floor through the building of rank-and-file committees. The UAW refused to inform members of the election or properly distribute ballots, resulting in the disenfranchisement of most workers. Only about 9 percent voted, with Fain eking out a bare 600 vote margin of victory in the runoff.

Doug said the contract struggle had convinced him Fain’s election did not result in change. “He [Fain] is just as bad as they are,” he said of the previous leadership jailed over corruption.

Reflecting on the “stand-up strike” he said, “They had little plants strike, but kept the big plants working. It definitely wasn’t a real strike, where you are out there with a pitchfork.

“As soon as they called a strike it should have been all the way. There shouldn’t have been this wait time. Pick a plant one by one. If everyone was going on strike, we should have done it then and there. There was a lot of playing around. It shouldn’t be these

people over here are striking and those are not.

“We are on the ground, we are the ones running things, but we don’t actually have a voice. When you do say something, you get fired. They think they know how the workers feel from the top. Either that, or they don’t care. I think it’s they don’t care.

“They are only about themselves. It makes people not want to work, because they are screwing you over. If it was not for us, they would be out of benefits.”



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