

“The UAW knew these layoffs were coming”: Toledo Jeep workers denounce job cuts

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Stellantis workers on the way into the Toledo Assembly Complex Saturday denounced the corporation and the United Auto Workers for the sudden announcement late last week that 1,225 workers will be laid off indefinitely as early as February 5. The company, which owns the Chrysler, Dodge, Ram and Jeep brands, also said it will carry out 2,465 “temporary” layoffs at its Detroit Assembly Complex Mack plant.

The mass layoffs come just over two weeks after the UAW announced the ratification of its supposedly “record contracts” for 146,000 Stellantis, Ford and General Motors workers. UAW President Shawn Fain and the Biden administration claimed the new four-and-a-half-year deals would “create” thousands of jobs. In fact, the deals give the automakers a green light to slash tens of thousands of jobs as they transition to electric vehicle production.

Prior to the contract vote in mid-November, UAW Local 12 officials told Toledo workers that a new shift would be added at the Jeep plant and most of the 1,200 “supplemental employees (SE),” Stellantis’ term for temporary workers, would be converted to full-time positions. Now, virtually all the temporary workers—some of whom have worked for four or five years—are being tossed onto the unemployment lines.

“We’re losing our jobs with the holidays around the corner,” a 20-year-old supplemental worker, who used the name “Evan” to protect himself from retaliation, told reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site*. “We’re already in the hole from the six-week strike and since we’ve been back, we’ve only been getting three days a week. They promised to roll us over but instead they’re cutting us right before we get more money and benefits.

“Everybody had high hopes for this contract. The UAW just surrendered. After it was passed, GM gave its shareholders billions. It’s inhumane and immoral for rich CEOs and investors to make so much when people are

starving and struggling for their families to survive.”

Stellantis officials have cynically claimed the layoffs were necessary to “manage sales of the vehicles we build to comply with California emission regulations.” Under the regulations, which are also being adopted by 12 other states, all new cars sold in 2035 and beyond will be zero emission vehicles. “Unfortunately, this change will result in job losses,” a robocall message sent to workers said.

The emission regulations in themselves are completely inadequate to address the climate crisis. Moreover, Biden’s promotion of electric vehicles is chiefly driven by his administration’s efforts to counter China’s domination of the EV market, semiconductors and critical raw materials, not out of any genuine environmental considerations.

For its part, Stellantis is pinning the blame for the layoffs on the emission regulations—which do not take effect for 12 years—to divert workers’ anger behind support for rolling back any interference with its profit-making. In this, the company is lining up behind sections of the Republican Party, including Donald Trump, who are more closely aligned with the oil industry and oppose the California rules and similar regulations.

Just last week, Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares was boasting at an event sponsored by Wall Street investment bank Goldman Sachs that his company was one of the few traditional automakers, if not the only one, currently making money on EVs in the US and Europe. “Already, (there is) significant money with the EV business, but there is a lot of uncertainty out there,” including the outcome of the US and European Parliament elections next year.

Traditional companies, he said, were in the best position to win the “Darwinian” struggle to dominate the EV market “because basically, we are doing very good money with the legacy business.” Defeating competition from China and newer companies like Tesla, he said, requires

drastically reducing production costs and the selling prices of EVs. This could only be achieved, Tavares said, “if you reduce cost, and this is what we are reasonably good at.”

The UAW deal will do this through the tens of thousands of “voluntary employment termination” packages being offered to UAW workers, the closure of 19 facilities, and the collusion of the UAW in job cuts like those occurring in Toledo and Detroit. Concealing this from the members, Fain claimed the UAW “pushed the company to not only stop job cuts but add 5,000 more jobs,” and “the right to strike means we can protect these jobs with our most powerful tool.”

The UAW International and Local 12 officials have made it clear they will do nothing to fight the devastating job cuts in Toledo and Detroit. In the face of a torrent of opposition over the layoff of SEs, the Local 12 Jeep Executive Committee claimed 900 would be converted to full-time status—before being laid off indefinitely!

In another effort to mollify anger, union officials are now saying they are pressing the company to implement “inverse layoffs” by urging higher-paid, more experienced workers to accept temporary layoffs. But this would only delay the inevitable for supplementals who would be bumped out as soon as the older workers returned.

“The power has got to be in the hands of the workers on the shop floor”

“I tell the temps they are being lied to by the union and deceived into thinking they will have a job after February,” Bill, a veteran worker, told the WSWS. “They are not going to have a job. They don’t have the time in service to have call-back rights of any kind. They will roll them over just to tease the contract. In reality, they are being fired. When their unemployment runs out it is over for them.

“This was a set-up. The UAW knew these job cuts were coming. If Will Lehman won the UAW presidential election, this would never have happened,” he said, referring to the Mack Trucks workers and socialist candidate for UAW president. Lehman based his campaign in last year’s UAW election on the call for a transfer of power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shop floor.

“Fain is not liked in this plant anymore. All his talk about fighting the companies was only a ruse. Some of the workers saw Fain as a savior. I voted for Will who was on point from day one. There will be a good opportunity if Will stays active. With this contract, and when the dust is settled, they will see what Will was fighting for is what we need.”

Bill also commented on Biden’s support for Israel’s genocidal war on the Palestinians in Gaza and the squandering of trillions on war. “What is going on is horrific. It’s nothing less than a genocide and Biden is completely backing it with money and weaponry. How can there be a ‘war’ when the Palestinians don’t have an army? The US clearly doesn’t care about human rights. I don’t see how they can continue to fund these wars. We pay for all this through our labor.”

“I’m young and we all have a lot on the line to fight for,” Evan, the young supplemental, told the WSWS. “The UAW acted like they were fighting hard for us. But that was a façade. We should have all been on strike together. This ‘stand up’ strike played well in the media, but the companies didn’t take it seriously. The union officials are just another rank to keep us in check. Fain was meeting with Biden. The union tops are only there to make money for Biden’s wars. What is happening in Gaza is disgusting, and I don’t agree with it.”

“Workers have to keep fighting for better treatment,” Evan said. “But the power has got to be in the hands of the workers on the shop floor. We’re the ones who make things happen, who do the work. Without us, there are no cars, no money.”

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