

“It was a lie”: Workers denounce UAW as Stellantis fires hundreds of supplemental employees

Jerry White
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The Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network and the World Socialist Web Site are holding an emergency online meeting this Saturday, January 20, at 1 p.m. Eastern / 12 p.m. Central to discuss how to organize to stop mass layoffs in the auto industry. Register here.

Friday was the last day of work for 550 supplemental employees (SE) at Stellantis auto plants in Detroit and across the United States. The SEs, who are largely younger workers and single parents, were fired with no prior notice from the company or the United Auto Workers.

In a letter sent to at least 171 SEs at the Warren Truck plant in suburban Detroit, management said, “Your last day work will be noted as January 12, 2024, and your medical benefits will last until the end of January. We do appreciate your contribution to the company and wish you well in your future endeavors.”

The mass firings of SEs, Stellantis’ term for temporary workers, is the direct outcome of the betrayal of last year’s contract struggle by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy, led by President Shawn Fain, who lyingly asserted that “the era of perma-temps is over.” In the contract “highlighter” the UAW provided to 44,000 Stellantis workers before they voted, the union claimed that 3,200 SEs would be converted to full-time employment within the first year of the agreement and after that any SE with nine months of service “will automatically have full-time status.”

In fact, the UAW was fully aware of the company’s plans to eliminate the jobs of thousands of SEs before they were converted and deliberately misled workers to get the pro-company contract ratified.

“Fain said the strike would make things better for the TPTs and that we would be protected from being fired for nothing and from mass layoffs,” Hannah, a young worker who was terminated from the Warren Truck plant told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “It all was a lie.

“I have a perfect attendance record with Stellantis, I know multiple jobs, am reliable and I was terminated from the company. The union is saying there is nothing they can do for us, yet we’ve been paying union dues,” Hannah continued, “We had no warning and opportunity to prepare for this. It’s going to be a struggle, especially for those of us with kids. The job market is terrible, and most places are going back down to starting at \$12 an hour. We all just got raises to \$21 an hour and I didn’t even get to work a full week with my new rates. They fired us on the same day as the deadline to fill out your conversion form to get rolled over to full time.”

A breakdown of the SE terminations released by the UAW says 539 workers were cut on January 12, including 71 at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP), 145 at Detroit Assembly Complex-Jefferson, 171 at Warren Truck, 38 at Sterling Stamping and another 34 at Warren Stamping. In Indiana, 30 SEs were fired at the Kokomo Engine Plant, 24 at the Kokomo Transmission Plant, 19 at Indiana Transmission and seven at the Kokomo Transmission Plant.

In a January 13 letter to local union officials, UAW Vice President Rich Boyer cynically wrote that the UAW “addressed the abuse of Hourly Supplemental Employees (SEs) by the company continuously working the SEs extreme working hours and the lack of converting SEs to full time.” Defending the company’s

decision to throw 500 workers out of work last Friday, Boyer claimed the “SEs hadn’t been used for an extended period of time or the SEs had poor work performance/attendance.”

Boyer said that the company had agreed to convert 1,957 SEs company-wide and an additional 900 in the Toledo Assembly Plant by early February, out of a total 5,219 SEs employed by the company as of November 2023. As for the 900 workers the UAW says are being converted at the Toledo Assembly Complex, they are scheduled to be laid off in early February as part of the 1,225 layoffs at the Jeep plant the UAW has also accepted.

Significantly, Boyer stated the company intends to retain only around 500 SEs company wide, which “means there will be a significant reduction of roughly 1,600 SEs that will take place within the next few months, if not in lesser time.” Stellantis “doesn’t want to be forced to convert additional SEs that will attain nine months of corporate time and subsequently place the newly converted SE on layoff for lack of work, and then be forced to pay the newly converted SE SUB and unemployment for up to one year,” Boyer declared, making it clear the UAW would do nothing to defend the jobs of SEs or anyone else. He concluded by instructing local union presidents to “inform all the SEs of this information.”

In the Detroit area, Stellantis plans to lay off 2,453 workers by February 5, including 1,577 production workers, 104 skilled trades workers and 718 supplemental employees, according to the layoff notice the company filed with the state of Michigan. This includes 2,465 job cuts previously announced at its Detroit Assembly Complex-Mack plant, which are supposed to be temporary but could be permanent as the company moves to eliminate the third shift at the plant.

SEs at the Warren Truck plant flooded into a UAW Local 140 union meeting Sunday morning, despite bitterly cold temperatures, to get information about the layoffs. Terrified by the anger of rank-and-file workers, local union officials cancelled the meeting at 10 a.m., claiming there was “no quorum,” even though workers continued to arrive.

“We can’t get any answers from the leadership of the UAW right now,” a temporary worker told the WSWS. “They claimed there weren’t enough members, so they

cancelled the meeting. They don’t want to answer any questions. I’m disappointed in Fain. It sounded like a ruse.”

“They got the votes from these people, now you’re putting them on the street, and that’s unfair,” Andre, a full-time worker with six years at the plant told the WSWS. “People got kids, they got medical bills, they got sickly people at home. I’m speechless. The union president is marching downtown and going up to see the president of the United States. Why doesn’t he come down here and tell people what’s happening. These workers put all their dreams into these places, and they have to find something else to survive.”

Hannah concluded, “We fought to get better, to make more money, and then they get rid of us. They brought us in at a very cheap wage, especially compared to other people in the plant. We held down the ‘critical status’ [mandatory overtime the UAW agreed to]. The full-timers were able to leave, but we were working 12-and-a-half hours, six to seven days a week. They hired us in at a cheaper wage to make them a bunch of profit off their trucks and get rid of us when the new contract comes into effect.

“Shawn Fain never called us to walk out, but he said the strike would make things better for the temporary workers. The UAW hyped up this contract, but it doesn’t benefit us.

“Workers need to act, not on the false promises they keep telling us, but what we all need.”

The attack on jobs confirms the warnings that the WSWS and the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committees Network made about the contract. To fight the assault on jobs, autoworkers must expand the network of rank-and-file committees in every plant to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shop floor. To contact the Autoworker Rank-and-File Committees Network, fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact