

Oppose the mass firings at Stellantis and the escalating assault on jobs!

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
17 January 2024

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.

With the sudden firing of hundreds of supplemental (temporary) workers at Stellantis in the United States, the rapidly escalating jobs massacre in the auto industry and around the world is entering a new phase.

Without warning, 539 workers were fired in Metro Detroit and Kokomo, Indiana last week and told their insurance would be cut off by the end of the month. A supplemental employee (SE) at the Indiana Transmission Plant in Kokomo reported that 100 SEs were fired on Tuesday, with more firings coming today.

In a January 13 letter to local officials, the UAW acknowledged, “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.”

In fact, the UAW has given the company a green light to fire almost half of the nearly 5,300 supplementals the company employed before the ratification of the new UAW-Stellantis labor agreement in November. This is on top of the 3,700 layoffs previously announced at Stellantis at the end of last year, as well as hundreds more at General Motors and Ford.

The mass firings underscore the scale of the betrayal and treachery of the UAW apparatus, which rammed through contracts last fall after its phony “stand-up” strike. The firings have provoked a firestorm of opposition from SEs, who have denounced the UAW for lying to them and have called on full-time workers to join the fight against the mass firings, saying that full-time workers in the plants will be the next targets.

If the layoffs are to be defeated, workers will have to take matters into their own hands. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls on workers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW apparatus, at every auto plant in order to share information and coordinate common action, including the preparation of strikes and other struggles to force a stop to the job cuts.

Workers must revive the old labor slogan, “An injury to one

is an injury to all!” Unless the layoffs are stopped now, corporate owners will proceed to wipe out huge swaths of jobs and terrorize those workers who remain. Social devastation, homelessness, drug addiction, suicides and other social ills will be left in the wake.

Indeed, the layoffs already announced are only the tip of the spear of the biggest wave of layoffs in the auto industry in a half-century, involving hundreds of thousands of jobs. The companies are utilizing emerging electric vehicle (EV) technology to eliminate whole sections of the workforce.

Next on the chopping block will be engine and powertrain workers, who will be replaced by battery workers making a fraction of their wages. Starting wages at GM-owned battery maker Ultium are pegged at 75 percent of standard pay under the new GM contract. Layoffs are also already cascading among auto parts workers at companies such as Syncreon, Borg Warner and others.

The firings and layoffs are international in scope. Stellantis also announced 2,250 job cuts at its Fiat and Maserati divisions in Italy. Ford is closing its plant at Saarlouis, Germany, following a bidding war for new EV work with its plant in Spain. German parts makers Continental and Bosch have also announced layoffs in recent weeks. Studies suggest the EV transition will be used to cut 500,000 jobs in Europe alone.

Other industries are also using emerging technologies, including automation and artificial intelligence, to carry out huge layoffs. UPS has cut hundreds of warehouse jobs as part of the logistics firm’s plans to triple its use of robotics over the course of the year. One recent survey found four in 10 business leaders expected to carry out layoffs this year, with similar numbers citing automation as a major reason.

The working class must respond to this global jobs bloodbath with a global counteroffensive in defense of workers’ livelihoods. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees calls for an international movement to be built uniting workers throughout the entire industry, and drawing in workers in logistics and other sectors, to force a halt and reversal to the job cuts.

A rebellion is necessary against the entire union bureaucracy. The new UAW administration of President Shawn Fain was installed in a maneuver involving the federal government, in an

election marred by fraud where more workers never received ballots than the number who actually voted, so that Fain could use dishonest phrases to cover up the next stage in the attack on jobs.

Fain's "stand-up" strike at the Big Three last Fall kept the vast majority of workers on the job producing profits, while those on strike were strung out on the picket lines. The strike was ended before workers even voted, with many workers alleging fraud when the UAW announced "yes" votes.

In order to get supplemental workers to vote in favor, the UAW promised at the time that they would be "rolled over" to full-time status. Now that they have served their purpose, they are being disposed of.

Groups like Unite All Workers for Democracy and the Democratic Socialists of America, who promoted Fain, now occupy top posts within the bureaucracy itself and are directly responsible for helping to impose the deepest layoffs since the 1980s. Meanwhile, Fain is being hailed as "Labor Leader of the Year" in the business press for services rendered to the corporate oligarchy.

Similar maneuvers have been carried out at other unions where decades of betrayals have tarnished the image of the bureaucracy. This includes the Teamsters, where General President Sean O'Brien's administration is helping UPS to carry out layoffs.

The task is not to "pressure" the apparatus to act on behalf of workers, but to destroy it and replace it with rank-and-file committees that workers actually control. The hostility of the bureaucracy to the workers is determined by its social interests. Its only concern, as far as the EV transition goes, is that it continue to be allowed to siphon off workers' dues money in order to finance its six-figure salaries and expensive vacations.

The pro-corporate apparatus of the UAW is implementing the demands of the ruling class, defended by the entire political system and the Democratic and Republican parties.

Layoffs are official government policy. The Federal Reserve has spent the past two years raising interest rates for the explicit purpose of increasing job cuts so as to drive down wages. Unemployment is a weapon against workers' demands for wages that keep pace with inflation. The Biden administration has carried out this policy through the trade union bureaucracy. This is the true meaning of Biden's claim to be the most "pro-labor president in American history."

The aim is to free up resources to bolster the profits of the financial system and fund the rapidly escalating wars in Europe and Asia. The auto industry is particularly critical in the preparations for war against China, which currently dominates EV supply chains that Washington wants to control.

The layoffs also demonstrate the significance of socialist autoworker Will Lehman's campaign for UAW president. His campaign stressed the need to smash, not reform, the union bureaucracy. He connected this rank-and-file rebellion with the need for workers to adopt a socialist program based on a fight

against the capitalist system itself.

Under capitalism, advances in technology have always been used to vastly increase the rate of exploitation of the working class. But this same technology, which makes work easier and more efficient, could be used to ease life's burdens, reduce work hours with no loss in pay, and free up resources to eliminate poverty, homelessness and other social problems.

The basic problem is who controls this technology. Will the capitalist oligarchy be allowed to use electric vehicles and automation to enrich itself at the expense of the working class, while plunging headlong into war, or will the working class use these technologies to meet society's needs instead of increasing private profit?

Workers must begin now to build the counter-offensive from below. They must assert that they have every right to prepare all measures they deem necessary in defense of their livelihoods, including job actions. This requires the development of a network of rank-and-file workplace action committees in all plants, independent of and in opposition to the United Auto Workers bureaucracy.

The IWA-RFC calls for the following:

- An immediate end to all job cuts and the reinstatement of all those already affected!
- A reduction of the length of the workday, with an *increase* in pay, to account for the fewer hours needed to produce EVs and make up for decades of stagnant wages!
- Unite across borders to fight the global jobs massacre!
 - Place the auto industry under social ownership and democratic workers' control!

Build a rank-and-file committee to carry out this fight at your plant. Use the form below to contact the WSWS for assistance and to connect with other rank-and-file committees in the auto industry and beyond.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact