

Social crisis in Warren, Michigan, a center of the auto industry

James Langley
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On Tuesday, despite frigid temperatures and snow, dozens of workers lined up in Warren, Michigan to collect food from the Macomb County Food Pantry.

In 2024, just in Macomb County, which comprises the northeast suburbs of Detroit, 10 percent of residents already live below the federal poverty line and 13 percent face food insecurity.

These statistics are part of an upward trend in food insecurity across the state, found by the USDA in a recent study. The report notes that 1.2 million Michigan residents already reported living in food insecurity between 2020 and 2022.

The study attributes the current rise in hunger to inflation, falling wages, and the cutting of vital federal programs implemented at the beginning of the pandemic, including the Universal School Meal Program and the federal Child Tax Credit. Participation has also dropped in state-run, federally funded food assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC.

In Macomb County, workers are also facing cuts to other social services, including healthcare coverage. After Biden ended the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency last May, a quarter of a million Michigan residents have lost Medicaid, while thousands more continue to lose coverage each month.

As laid off auto workers lose their employer health insurance and are removed from Medicaid, the barest preventive measures to prevent infection, such as COVID-19 tests and vaccinations, are now unaffordable.

Macomb County is home to a number of major Stellantis plants, including Warren Truck Assembly Plant (WTAP) and Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP). Historically a center of the auto industry, the region has been hollowed out by decades of cost cutting measures implemented by the companies.

Central to this dynamic has been the United Auto Workers apparatus.

Year after year, the UAW has pushed through one pro-company deal after another, leading to waves of layoffs, the implementation of tiers, and the general outsourcing of production.

Since his election to office last year, UAW President Shawn Fain has faithfully maintained this legacy.

As workers lined up to receive cheese, meat, cereal and juice, less than a mile away, 171 supplemental employees at Warren Truck were fired in recent weeks.

The layoffs at Warren Truck, part of a growing wave of cost cutting measures across the globe, follow Fain's claim that the union had won "record" deals from the Detroit Three automakers during last year's contract negotiations.

Over the last month, thousands of layoffs have been announced across auto and other industries, including 12,000 layoffs at UPS yesterday, following last year's sellout agreement by the Teamsters union.

The Stellantis layoffs come on the heels of \$15.6 billion consolidated earnings in the first half of 2023, with net profits rising to a record of \$12.1 billion in the same period.

So far, the only record resulting from the UAW contract has been the record profits announced by the auto companies and the record pace in which the rotten terms of the contract have become clear. This includes yesterday's announcement by GM of \$2.1 billion in profits for the fourth quarter, beating Wall Street's expectations.

Another record soon to be recorded may be the time fired workers have to wait in food lines.

Across the board, laid off workers living in communities already ripped apart by decades of union betrayals are now facing the threat of eviction, lost

healthcare coverage, and homelessness, as a fired Warren Truck worker recently reported to the WSWs.

Since the beginning of the pandemic three years ago, the UAW has consciously worked with the companies and the state to force workers back to work, cover up cases on the production line, and remove even the slightest mitigation measures in the plants. As a result, at least 1 in 189 Macomb County residents have died from the virus, with a total of 4,626 reported deaths.

The role of the UAW in the ruling class attack on workers living standards is twofold.

First, seen in last year's phony "stand-up strike," is the direct collaboration between the company and the union to keep wages below inflation, cut costs, prevent strikes and strangle the developing opposition among the rank and file in the plants.

Second is the support given by the UAW apparatus and Fain to the imperialist powers' plans for war, including the union's political backing of the Democratic Party and the Biden administration.

For the ruling class to continue to fund genocide in Gaza, the proxy war in Ukraine against Russia, and further conflict across the globe, funds must be slashed from social programs and redirected to the nearly \$1 trillion Pentagon budget passed last year. These programs include Medicaid, SNAP, WIC and other programs which are now being cut.

While Fain proclaimed last week that the President would stand up to the "billionaire class" and fight for "economic justice," he has made no mention of the administration's program of war and austerity.

The role of the UAW bureaucracy, central to the ruling class's need to suppress the class struggle at home, will also be critical in ensuring the production of military vehicles, including tanks and Bradley Fighting Vehicles (BFVs), products which will soon be in high demand as war unfolds.

Across the board, workers' lives and living standards must be sacrificed on the altar of war and profit. Social programs must be cut to fund the war, and the profitability of the companies must be maintained through layoffs as the industry transitions to electric vehicle (EV) production. In this, the United Auto Workers, the state and the ruling class are unified.

In opposition to the policies of the ruling class, the International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees (IWA-RFC), the spearhead of rank and file

opposition, is organizing independently of the UAW apparatus to prevent war and further attacks on workers' livelihoods.

Two weeks ago, the IWA-RFC called 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!



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