

Last days of work for thousands of Stellantis autoworkers facing job cuts at Toledo and Detroit plants

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Thousands of Stellantis workers at assembly plants in Detroit and Toledo, Ohio, are working their last days before losing their jobs. The workers, who include full-time and supplementary (temporary) employees, are being laid off without the slightest opposition from the United Auto Workers bureaucracy.

In early December, just weeks after workers ratified supposedly “historic” and “job-saving” contracts pushed by the UAW, Stellantis announced that nearly 3,700 workers would be laid off, starting February 5. This included 2,455 workers at the Detroit Assembly Complex-Mack, where the Jeep Grand Cherokee is produced, and another 1,225 workers at the Toledo Assembly Complex who build the Jeep Wrangler and Gladiator.

Workers at the Detroit plant reported that Thursday was the last day for the third shift, and production had been reduced to two shifts. Though company officials claim this is a temporary measure, they have repeatedly threatened to eliminate the shift outright, accusing workers of supposedly poor performance and high absentee rates.

In fact, the layoffs are part of a company-wide, cost-cutting plan, stretching from North America to Europe. The labor agreements signed by UAW President Shawn Fain and backed by President Joe Biden will facilitate the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs as the global automakers seek to gain an edge in the highly competitive electric vehicle markets.

The job cuts are hitting workers the day after Fain hosted Biden at a campaign event at the UAW Region 1 union headquarters in Warren, Michigan. Biden praised the UAW bureaucracy for imposing the job-cutting agreement. Outside the event, riot police with armored vehicles attacked protesters denouncing the US president for backing Israeli’s genocide in Gaza.

A worker at the Detroit plant told the WSWs that 750 supplementary workers were let go as part of the job cuts, right before they were scheduled to be rolled over to full-

time status.

The UAW claimed in the contract “highlighter” it provided to 44,000 Stellantis workers before they voted, that 3,200 supplemental employees (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.”

This was a lie to sell the contract and the UAW bureaucracy knew it. On January 12, Stellantis summarily fired 539 SEs. The following day, UAW Vice President Rich Boyer admitted that the company only agreed to roll over 1,957 SEs company-wide and an additional 900 in the Toledo Assembly Plant, out of a total of 5,219 SEs employed by the company as of November 2023.

Significantly, Boyer stated that Stellantis intended 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.”

The day after the contract expired on September 14, Fain called out the 5,500 workers at the Toledo plant as part of his bogus “stand up strike,” which kept two-thirds of the UAW membership on the job making profits for the Big Three. Despite this effort to wear down their militant resistance to another UAW sellout agreement, workers at the plant voted by more than 55 percent to reject the deal.

In the run-up to the contract ratification, UAW Local 12 officials claimed a third shift and new jobs would be added to the Toledo plant and 900 out of the nearly 1,100 supplementals would get permanent jobs. Now, UAW officials say the 900 will be chosen from a “company-wide” pool and assigned to Toledo as their “home plant.”

Out of those, only 372 will stay at the Toledo Assembly Complex, while 500 will be forced to the Detroit Assembly-Jefferson plant and 20 to Toledo Machining. SEs from Toledo and Jefferson may be able to switch places to shorten their commutes. UAW officials say the layoffs will begin on February 19, two weeks after the original February 5 date.

“Here’s the kicker,” an SE told the WSW. “They aren’t doing these rollovers based on corporate date/hire date. It’s based on the last four digits of your Social Security number, meaning people with five to six years might not be rolled over based on their Social Security number. The contract specifically states that the full-time canvass will be done by corporate date. This Social Security number thing is coming from UAW International. I’m guessing someone’s relative wouldn’t get rolled over if it went by corporate date, so they’re pulling some BS.”

“Fain is not backing us or doing anything to stop Stellantis from laying us off.”

WSWS reporters spoke to workers at the Toledo plant on Friday. One SE scoffed at the “record” contract the UAW claimed it achieved. “Fain is not backing us or doing anything to stop Stellantis from laying us off. Then he goes and endorses Biden. One of my best friends is Palestinian and he says it’s garbage that the UAW is backing Biden.”

SEs still did not know their fate, he said. “The UAW local officials said they would let us know on Sunday, February 4, the day before the layoffs are set to start.”

“The whole contract was a set-up,” a full-time worker with more than seven years told the WSW. “They just said what workers wanted to hear. All they are interested in is collecting union dues, not helping us.”

McGraw, a worker with over 10 years, said he had just come from a local union meeting where angry rank-and-file workers had confronted Local 12 officials about the layoffs. “They said it was a record-breaking contract, but the only thing they keep doing is breaking us, getting rid of all these jobs they said they were going to keep. They kept their promise by laying people off.

“The schedules we work right now, they’re not the work-life balance they said we were going to get. I have an eight-year-old and a 15-year-old and if I’m not taking personal time to take off to go and see them, I only got Sunday, and that’s only if I don’t have to work overtime...And this is supposed to be a prestigious job.”

Asked what he thought about Fain endorsing Biden, who was backing Israel’s genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza, he said, “It’s the same thing we get from numerous politicians, we got duped” by Fain, he said.

Another worker commenting on the mass layoffs spreading across the US and the world said, “People with jobs don’t join the military. I expect a lot of layoffs this year in an attempt to force people into joining the militaries and

fighting these wars for big business.”

The global automakers are carrying out a worldwide attack on jobs, including tens of thousands of layoffs at VW, Bosch, Continental, ZF and other companies in Germany. But the job cuts are not limited to the global auto industry. Earlier this week, UPS announced 12,000 layoffs, largely centered on middle and lower-level managers. But the company also reduced the work hours of unionized workers by 10 percent and cut shifts last quarter. At the same time, it plans to triple the use of automation to squeeze more volume out of fewer workers. The jobs cuts come after the imposition of another so-called “historic” contract by the Teamsters bureaucracy.

The destruction of jobs is a deliberate policy of the ruling class, backed by Biden, Trump and both corporate-controlled parties. According to a new report by Challenger, Gray & Christmas, companies announced 82,307 job cuts in January. Job cuts announcements were up 136 percent from the previous month and marked the second-highest layoff total in the month of January since 2009, the year after the global financial crash.

The cuts were “driven by broader economic trends and a strategic shift towards increased automation and AI adoption in various sectors, though in most cases, companies point to cost-cutting as the main driver for layoffs,” the job outplacement firm reported.

The working class must organize a counter-offense to defend jobs and living standards. But this will only be successful if it is organized independently of the pro-capitalist and pro-war union bureaucracies, and coordinated across national borders to fight the global corporations and the capitalist governments that back them. This means expanding the network of rank-and-file committees in the auto factories and other workplaces, and building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

If labor-saving technology is to be used for the benefit of society—to reduce the workweek and greatly increase the income of workers, not throw them into the streets—then the auto industry and all the major corporations must be transformed into public utilities, collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class itself.



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