

Fired Stellantis worker in Atesa, Italy: “The unity of the exploited masses scares the bosses!”

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Stellantis is aggressively pursuing a ruthless restructuring of its operations worldwide in its transition to electric vehicles (EVs). Thousands of workers, from the US to France, have been laid off. Plans for mass dismissals are well advanced, despite a record profit in 2023 and strong projections in the first months of 2024.

Italy is no exception. The historic Mirafiori and Pomigliano d’Arco plants are slated for massive layoffs and reduced operations. The current furloughs, originally extended to March 30, have been further prolonged until April 20. The company has announced the termination of entire lines, such as Maserati Levante, and reduction of Fiat 500 EV production.

Meanwhile, other Stellantis factories are pushing through similar policies, whether through individual or collective measures. The Cassino plant has already been subject to *cassa integrazione* (redundancy pay) as well as forced transfers (aptly referred to by workers as “deportations”).

The state and the trade unions have heeded CEO Carlos Tavares’ extortionist demands. While the government of fascist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is preparing to grant \$1 billion in incentives, the union bureaucracies have supinely lobbied for Stellantis, appealing to the ultraright-wing executive, thus exposing their complete subordination to the capitalist state.

Tavares has been promoted by the media as some sort of superstar. His “tours” around North American plants have rightfully provoked the anger and contempt of thousands of workers whose future is hanging by a thread.

The CEO has also been touring Europe in recent

months. One of his “performances” took place last January at the Sevel Plant in Val di Sangro, Italy, also known as Sevel-Sud. Opened in 1981, the plant produces FIAT, Citroën and Peugeot light vehicles for Stellantis. Until not long ago, about 6,200 workers were employed there. Today a more accurate figure is around 5,000, pointing to an ongoing process of erosion of jobs due to early retirement package offers and delocalization to Poland and other countries.

The Stellantis Sevel Val di Sangro plant, originally financed through public funds in 1978 on the backdrop of a struggle by citizens’ committees and local farmers named NO ALLA SANGRO CHIMICA (“No to chemical Sangro”), started production of light vehicles in 1981. Today, it produces FIAT, Citroën and Peugeot light vehicles under Stellantis. It is the largest plant of light vehicles in Europe.

The WSWS spoke to Francesca Felice, a Sevel worker who was fired early this month.

WSWS: Can you tell us about your experience at Sevel?

Francesca Felice: I’m 45 years old. I was initially hired in 2006 on an apprenticeship, then with a permanent contract in 2007. I’ve worked at IVECO [Stellantis] in Suzzara [Mantova] and several other adjacent plants [formerly Fiat] in Northern Italy. The most important and longest experience has been in the auto industry, when since the beginning I was a member of FIOM CGIL, with a representative role for the minority inside the plant. I then switched to SLAI Cobas [a “base” union] and fought many strikes against overtime, for safety, including during the COVID pandemic, and for the improvement of working, economic and employment conditions.

WSWS: What is the mood in the auto industry in recent months?

FF: Since the beginning of this year, I've been very active in protests in support of our brothers and sisters at the Stellantis Cassino plant, against the agreement signed by the unions forming the Contratto Collettivo Specifico di Lavoro [CCSL, or Specific Collective Labor Agreement], which enables the company to implement obligatory quarterly reassignments to other factories, with dire consequences for the lives and emotional bonds of the workers affected by this.

We also protested Tavares' visit to our plant on January 22, denouncing the absence of a definitive industrial and employment plan as well as the delocalization of production to Gliwice in Poland.

I have also fought a prolonged battle for the recognition of the right to personal health conditions, as I suffer from a degenerative autoimmune disease and was qualified to have reduced working capacity with a definitive targeted placement in April 2022. Despite this, I was forced to fight for years to obtain a work description that would be compatible with my state of health. Unfortunately, similar conditions persist for hundreds of colleagues within the factory due to an exhausting work pace.

WSWS: When and why did Stellantis fire you?

FF: On February 15 I received a disciplinary complaint at the end of my shift, the content of which was the prelude to a dismissal. I was then fired after several days of a stressful wait, as my arguments were deemed irrelevant by company management. From that day, my life was suspended because I was deprived of any future economic certainty.

I was accused of having a union-related discussion at my workstation, which allegedly turned to a confrontation with a union representative of the FIM CISL union.

Following the formalization of my dismissal, on the occasion of the International Women Workers Day on March 8, we proclaimed an eight-hour strike throughout the entire plant and on all working shifts. At the protest, my comrade Delio Fantasia, also fired in February from the Cassino plant, and a large delegation of FLMU-CUB workers, as well as other related factories and Pirelli workers, showed their support.

WSWS: What would you tell workers who may be facing a similar situation, given Stellantis' plan to

restructure its global industrial complex?

FF: The fundamental messages, expressed by many voices, have been and will remain the following: We must bring out class consciousness among workers, without which the class struggle, so indispensable to change our conditions, cannot be successful.

We must unify our struggles, as the unity of the exploited masses scares the bosses! Only the workers' vanguards, who are, not surprisingly, hit hard by employers' repression, can carry out this unavoidable task. I will continue the legal battle to demonstrate the speciousness of the charges that led to my dismissal, with the hope of a timely reinstatement to prevent that what happened to me could happen to others.

WSWS: What are some of the political lessons workers can draw from your experience?

FF: If you ask me, "Do you feel politically represented?" the answer is "absolutely not." It is no coincidence that I did not participate in the recent regional election. The right-wingers won. Many are pissed off at people like me who didn't go to vote. But it is not my fault, the responsibility for abstention lies with the left, or rather the "pseudo-left" and with the organizations that over the years have disconnected with reality, standing light years away from ordinary people.

These pseudo-left organizations have looked increasingly to the right. They are responsible for the worst laws against workers [from the Treu Law of 1997 to the Jobs Act of 2018]. They have fueled disinterest in politics, frustration and total resignation. I hold them responsible. I'm pissed off and I don't feel represented at all; there is no political force that carries forward our demands. The right advances in Italy and unfortunately elsewhere. This is a process that does not begin today but has been growing for over 20 years now.



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