

UAW sets strike vote at Stellantis Warren Stamping over health and safety but raises no demands

Shannon Jones
2 May 2024

Are you an autoworker? Fill out the form at the end of the article to join the fight for rank-and-file committees.

In the wake of continuing layoffs, workers at Stellantis Warren Stamping in the north Detroit suburbs are set to take a strike vote Monday over local health and safety issues. About 1,100 work at the factory that stamps parts for about a half dozen Stellantis plants that build various Jeep models and Dodge Ram heavy duty and light trucks.

According to a statement by Local 869 President Romaine McKinney III posted on the uaw.org website, “When it rains, the facility floods because the ceiling is leaking. We have to fight for every single pair of work gloves, while we handle metal and materials to build world class vehicles for Stellantis. The list goes on, and we’re putting an end to it. Our union grievance procedure gives us the power to stand up for safety on the job, and we intend to take action if necessary.”

However, the UAW has not taken the elementary step of outlining a series of concrete demands. This points to the fact that the strike vote being held by the UAW apparatus is meant as a token gesture aimed at allowing workers to vent anger in a way that does not actually impact the company.

The issue of safety is urgent and real. According to the US Occupational Health and Safety Administration, Stellantis was fined \$60,000 in June 2023 for six serious safety violations at the Warren Stamping plant including failure to ensure “walking-working surfaces are maintained free of hazards such as sharp or protruding objects, loose boards, corrosion, leaks, spills, snow, and ice.”

In May 2023, a welder died at Warren Stamping while at work. While the official cause of death was cited as cardiac arrest, welding is a high-risk occupation with many potential hazards, including exposure to toxic

gasses.

The announced strike vote takes place as anger is mounting among rank-and-file workers at all three Detroit-based automakers over layoffs, speedup and the deterioration of working conditions in the wake of the 2023 sellout labor deal reached by UAW President Shawn Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy.

A Stellantis worker at the Warren Truck Assembly plant adjacent to Warren Stamping said workers faced similar issues at their plant: “The workers at Warren Stamping have voted to strike because they company won’t fix hazardous conditions, give workers Kevlar sleeves to protect them against sharp metal.

“We have no lives outside the factories, even to raise our kids. Stellantis is cutting jobs, outsourcing mechanical work and supervisors are giving workers direct orders to do dangerous things. Three or four months ago, one worker was told to twist open a pressurized piece of equipment and she had hot fluid fly in her face.”

She added, “The UAW agreed to unlimited overtime for any stupid excuse, like they are in launch mode [for a new model] when they aren’t.”

The strike vote at Warren Stamping follows the death of a worker, Tywaun Long, at the Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan in April. Long collapsed on the assembly line and died while waiting almost 30 minutes for emergency medical responders to arrive. In the week since, at least two other workers have suffered serious injuries at the plant. This toll no doubt reflects the impact of the recent layoffs at the complex and the resultant job overloading.

There were 34 supplemental workers terminated at Warren Stamping in January as part of the mass firing by Stellantis of more than 2,000 temporary workers across the company who were told they would be rolled over to

full time positions under the new labor agreement. Since then thousands more full time and temporary workers have lost their jobs, including last week another 199 workers at Sterling Heights Assembly. That followed the firing of all supplemental workers who remained at the plant.

The strike vote comes as UAW President Fain has pledged full support for Biden's reelection and worked with Biden to sabotage the fight against layoffs. The Biden administration is integrating the UAW bureaucracy into its plans to impose wartime austerity, speed ups and labor discipline on workers as it expands its wars for global conquest.

The Warren Truck worker said she was horrified by the US-sponsored genocide of Palestinians and outraged at the police-state measures being used against campus anti-war protestors. "It breaks my heart to see the police arresting students at the universities. At Columbia, they renamed the hall after a little Palestinian girl who was killed. The students are expressing their rights and the politicians and police are taking away their free speech."

She added, "There is going to be a civil war in this country, and it's going to be between the upper echelons and regular working class people."

A supplemental worker at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "We were the last group that got terminated. I never worked part time. Now they are throwing me out like a piece of garbage."

"Everything in the contract should have been honored. They were saying all supplementals would get profit sharing and they turned around and got rid of everyone."

Referring to Fain and UAW Vice President Rich Boyer, she said, "I feel like they were selling out to save their jobs. Didn't anyone see this coming? They let them throw everyone out the door."

She added, "They are killing us. Even the people that are working are suffering; they can't get approved for vacations. They are going to start firing a lot of people for attendance."

At the Toledo Assembly Complex workers have been forced to work a grueling seven-day, 10-hour work schedule. The UAW's supposedly "historic" 2023 contract removed all restrictions on the ability of Stellantis to force overtime in loosely defined "emergencies."

The unsafe conditions workers face go far beyond leaky roofs and shortages of work gloves. At every level workers confront the disregard for safety in the interests of profits and production. Workers who complain about

unsafe conditions face the possibility of discipline and harassment. When workers confront UAW officials over unsafe conditions and practices they encounter stony indifference or the pat phrase "they can do that."

There is a long record of the UAW calling local strike votes and even occasionally calling "Hollywood" strikes at individual plants to show that the union is "fighting" and the leadership "cares."

A case in point was the three-day strike in September 2022 called by the UAW at the Stellantis Kokomo, Indiana casting plant. The strike was called over local contract issues. While the plant produced parts critical for Stellantis operations, the UAW organized the strike to have zero impact on the company's operations. Workers were called out on a weekend when no production was scheduled and at a time when many Stellantis plants were on reduced schedules due to chip shortages. Furthermore, the UAW ordered workers at other area Stellantis plants not to support workers on the picket line.

In any event, the UAW apparatus called off the strike after three days based on a worthless set of vague promises from management that did not specifically commit the company to do or change anything. Fain, who was then running for UAW president and was a former local union official at Kokomo Casting, endorsed this charade.

The defense of safe and health working conditions cannot be entrusted to the pro-corporate UAW apparatus and its joint union-management safety committees which only cover up unsafe conditions, not expose or rectify them. It requires the independent initiative of shop floor workers through the building of rank-and-file committees. These committees must fight for rank-and-file oversight and control over safety and working conditions, including the pace of production and manning levels.

Fill out the form below to join the fight for rank-and-file committees.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact