

Workers speak out against Rite Aid drugstore closings

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29 July 2024

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to workers in Michigan where most, if not all, Rite Aid stores are closing. The chain's distribution center located near Pontiac will be closed by mid-September.

Orlando, with 11 years at a Rite Aid in Metro Detroit, said, "It's capitalism. This is the kind of practice of the people on top to save their own skins. They are doing their best to keep their money and whatever kickbacks they can get, while the rest of us who do their labor get scraps."

Indeed. Jeffrey Stein, the CEO appointed to manage the mass shutdown of pharmacies, has been promised a \$20 million payout should he bring the chain out of bankruptcy. Meanwhile, he receives the princely sum of \$300,000 in monthly salary.

Orlando continued, "So much has happened in the US concerning politics. It seems the politicians have their own agendas, which does not allow us to live. So many people are working paycheck to paycheck, like me. It is frustrating because no party gives any concrete solutions.

"They work us to the bone. If any of the heads of Rite Aid, or any corporation walked into a workplace, we would just be faceless cogs in the machine. America boasts about being the richest country in the world, but I think the reality is in sharp contrast to that view."

Asked about what he planned to do, Orlando said, "I'll just have to find work elsewhere. When I first started working here, it was an entirely different set of conditions. At least they took care of the employees and their benefits. After a few years, however, everything that once made 'Rite Aid' into 'Rite Aid' was gone. It was a hurricane and everything eroded."

The drugstore chain filed for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy last October 2023, but workers received no official notice of the looming job losses until mid-June.

"We noticed less trucks coming to the store and less stuff on the trucks, but it wasn't until we had an 'emergency' conference call in June that we were told Rite Aid decided to close all their Michigan locations, and many in Ohio. I'm hoping to get severance pay, because we deserve it, but with all the shadiness going on, who knows?

"I also learned that the company is no longer honoring requests for our Paid Time Off (PTO). Looks like we'll lose that. And, I have not heard anything from the union. No interaction. If they're doing anything it would be news to me.

"In my opinion, issues that need attention and solutions are the homeless, the need for universal healthcare and the fact that so many people cannot make ends meet. They are just scrambling to live.

"The elections are pomp and circumstance. I'm not for Trump. Our lives should be protected, but that has not been the case for a long time. The problems facing the working class are more prominent now. There has to be some kind of change in this country. Something's got to give, otherwise we're done for.

"It is my sincerest wish that, in time, society will wake up and rise against the current status quo. That we, as a people, will unite as one to not only challenge the current system but to demand better for and of ourselves."

The WSWS also spoke with workers in a rural part of the state, where the closures will create "pharmacy deserts." Our reporter arrived at one store on its last day of operation. Another Rite Aid had shut its doors only a few miles away in February, and a nearby Walgreens shut down more than a year ago.

Only two workers remained in the store. They were tasked with the final sales. Packs of cigarettes were selling for only a dollar, and even the shelving was on

sale. A company overseeing the liquidation included two young contract workers who held signs on the roadside for hours in the hot sun to advertise the 95 percent price reduction of most products. One of them told the WSWS, “Workers shouldn’t have to be working and living paycheck to paycheck and still going into debt.”

Another worker noted that the loss of jobs at Rite Aid will have a devastating effect. “The people who worked here have worked here forever. I have 45 years here, my friend had 49 years and the manager had at least 30 years.” She said the full-time workers leave with 401(k)s, but no other severance payments or benefits were mentioned.

She expressed concern about the possibility of cuts to Social Security and the escalating diversion of funds into war. “They better not! I need Social Security; I’m expecting to get Social Security.”

Another worker pointed out, “They [Rite Aid] gave us a month’s notice that we would be laid off.” He said the store had 20 workers, on average, at the height of its operations. “Today was supposed to be my last day, but I signed on to help at other stores closing around Michigan.”



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