

Stop the mass layoffs at Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant!

Tom Hall**13 August 2024**

The announcement of 2,450 layoffs at Stellantis' Warren Truck Assembly Plant marks a new phase in the global war on jobs. Autoworkers must wage an all-out fight to force a halt to the cuts with coordinated actions, independent of the trade union bureaucracy, uniting workers across the US and the world. No time must be wasted between now and October 8, when the cuts are scheduled to take effect.

The cuts, equal to two-thirds of the plant's workforce, threatens the shutdown of a major factory in the center of the US auto industry. It will also have a major knock-on effect, triggering layoffs throughout the network of parts suppliers.

No doubt Warren Truck workers are being targeted for their militancy. The plant includes huge numbers of mostly young supplemental workers struggling to get by, as well as transplants from other factories already hard-hit by layoffs. In the first round of the 2022 United Auto Workers leadership election, socialist autoworker Will Lehman won 8.4 percent of the vote at the plant, and many workers have been involved in rank-and-file committees to oppose both management and union sellouts.

The plant was also the first in the US to take part in a global wildcat strike in early 2020 to force the industry to shut down during the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, a workers' initiative which saved countless lives.

The attack on Warren Truck is part of a global bloodletting in the auto industry. Since the start of this year, more than 8,000 workers at the US "Big Three" have lost their jobs. Stellantis has cut its Fiat workforce in Italy by thousands, Volkswagen is slashing jobs across Europe, and General Motors has announced major cutbacks to its operations in China.

UAW President Shawn Fain, scarcely concealing his indifference, reportedly told workers at the Mack plant in Detroit recently that auto simply "has its ups and downs." In fact, the UAW has helped slash hundreds of thousands of jobs over the past 50 years.

This has now reached a new stage, in which automakers are using electric vehicles and automation to eliminate whole sections of the workforce. As Stellantis CEO Carlos

Tavares put it, "the EV race has become a cost-cutting race."

This is part of a global attack on jobs in every industry, including among delivery workers, technology workers, actors and entertainment industry workers, and others. Paramount has announced it is closing its namesake TV studios and firing 15 percent of its workforce. The aim is to break the back of working class opposition, expressed in the growing push for strike action.

The capitalist class wants to impose the costs of the growing global crisis onto workers. The rise of unemployment, combined with a persistently high cost of living, has contributed to a decline in new vehicle sales, which were hardly affordable in the first place. Meanwhile, US corporate profits in the last quarter of 2023 were over \$2.8 trillion, the highest in history. While the stock markets also remain at historic levels, growing volatility and the danger of a new downturn have only sharpened the need for corporations to slash costs.

There is also a need to free up resources for war. The job cuts were announced as Ukraine launched a major offensive into Russia using US and German armored vehicles, and the US, backing its Israeli proxy, prepared for a region-wide war in the Middle East with Iran. The trillions flushed down the drain in military spending must be extracted, in the end, from greater exploitation of the working class.

As the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network recently declared:

Warren Truck is now a critical battleground in the global war on jobs. Autoworkers must make this the start of a broad counteroffensive, counterposing workers' right to employment and a decent standard of living against management's so-called "right" to profit.

This campaign must be international, the statement

stressed. In the era of globalized production, “there is no such thing anymore as an ‘American’ auto company ... Our real allies are not ‘loyal’ American businessmen, but autoworkers in every country.” For decades, the auto companies have whipsawed workers in each country against each other, but this has only been possible because autoworkers have remained divided across national lines. United globally, the working class is far more powerful than the bosses.

This requires a struggle against the union bureaucracy. The auto companies are relying completely on the bureaucrats in the UAW, and their counterparts in other countries, to strangle opposition to layoffs.

The Fain administration in the UAW was elected on nine percent turnout, amid mass vote suppression, as part of an operation involving the White House to elevate an experienced bureaucrat as a so-called “reformer” to help ram through the cuts now underway. This means workers fighting to defend jobs must take up the demand for a new union election, overseen by the rank-and-file.

All of the latest cuts have come since the toothless “standup strike” last year, which was followed by a contract the UAW bureaucrats—as well as President Joe Biden—falsely presented as a victory.

UAW-Stellantis Vice President Rich Boyer has admitted that the union leaders knew the layoffs were coming, but said nothing to the workers. The local president at Warren Truck also admitted to the press that the local officials knew these layoffs were planned. The UAW refused to even inform the workers, much less organize a campaign against it.

The union bureaucrats have been active partners in job cuts for decades. A major turning point came in the late 1970s, when UAW President Doug Fraser joined the Chrysler Board of Directors and helped close dozens of plants.

They have helped lower conditions in the plants to the level before the UAW was founded in the sit-down strikes of the 1930s. Meanwhile, union assets have swelled to over a billion dollars, and hundreds of officials “earn” six-figure salaries, supplemented by bribes and corruption.

The bureaucracy relies on its ties with capitalist politics, especially through the Democratic Party. Biden sees the union bureaucrats as war-time partners, summed up in his declaration last month that the AFL-CIO is his “domestic NATO.” But this is a single conflict with fronts not only abroad in Ukraine and Gaza, but at home against the working class.

To prepare public opinion and divert attention from the responsibility of American capitalism for job cuts in the US, the bureaucracy is promoting “America First” nationalism

and scapegoating foreigners. In one of the few statements on the Warren Truck cuts, Fain denounced the Portuguese CEO of Stellantis, Carlos Tavares, for destroying a “once-great *American* company [emphasis added],” and condemned production shifts to Mexico in an attempt to pit US workers against their Mexican counterparts.

The UAW is also rallying millions of dollars behind a “get-out-the-vote” effort for Kamala Harris. Hundreds of thousands of autoworkers, many of whom never got ballots for the UAW election, will be flooded with mailers from the UAW to support the bureaucracy’s preferred candidate. The UAW’s X/Twitter account has not acknowledged the Warren Truck layoffs, but is advertising a “national member call” on the “union’s campaign to defeat Trump and elect Kamala Harris.”

The UAW has also launched a cynical lawsuit against the fascists Elon Musk and Donald Trump over their recent interview on X, where the two billionaires gloated over threatening workers’ jobs. This is a maneuver designed to deflect attention from the cuts at Warren Truck and promote Harris as “pro-worker.”

In fact, the layoffs were announced shortly after Fain met with Harris at a rally in Detroit, where she denounced protesters criticizing the Biden administration’s role in the Gaza genocide. This is only the latest in several events where the UAW bureaucrats lined up with Harris/Biden against anti-war protesters, exposing its “ceasefire” resolution as so much hot air.

“The central strategic question workers face is throwing off the dead weight of the union bureaucracy,” the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Network Statement concluded. “It has no legitimate claim to leadership.” This is certainly true.

The fight for rank-and-file control is also bound up with the fight for the political independence of the working class. The fight for jobs is, at bottom, a fight against the capitalist system, which subordinates the lives of billions to the selfish profit motive.



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