

Amid continuing jobs threats, Kokomo Stellantis workers call for action against Warren Truck layoffs

George Kirby
20 August 2024

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is holding a meeting this Sunday, August 25, at 3:00 p.m. US Eastern Time, “For global action to defend jobs at Warren Truck and around the world!” To register, click here.

As Stellantis announces nearly 2,500 job cuts at its Warren Truck Assembly plant, workers at the company’s plants in Kokomo, Indiana expressed support for the call by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) for a unified, global fight to defend workers’ jobs.

Almost 8,000 Stellantis workers are employed at the four engine, casting and transmission plants in Kokomo, an industrial city of 60,000 people located 60 miles north of Indianapolis. Within months of the ratification of the United Auto Workers (UAW) labor agreement last fall, 337 temporary part-time (TPT) workers, also known as supplementary employees (SE), were fired. Over the last two months, workers have been on ongoing layoffs, with threats of further job cuts.

“I showed my coworkers about the Warren Truck job losses,” a member of the Kokomo Rank-and-File Committee told the WSWs, “people know it will be trickling down.” Another committee member said, “Workers are fearful of being without jobs for the next couple months. Some of the old timers who are ready to retire, they’re very concerned. I’ve never seen it this bad.”

Laid off workers have been fighting to collect unemployment benefits and company-paid supplemental unemployment benefits or SUB pay over the last two months. “We file unemployment for \$390 a week and then we’re supposed to get SUB pay to cover the rest of our paychecks. About two months ago, the company began requiring proof that we were getting unemployment benefits before we got SUB pay. There’s a lot of people who have issues receiving unemployment from the state of Indiana.

“So now, if they get unemployment messed up or delayed, they won’t get any pay until they get it fixed. I know people who have spent 3 hours on hold with the Indiana unemployment office.”

Far from opposing the job cuts in Kokomo, Warren Truck or

anywhere else, the UAW bureaucracy is acting as an arm of management and the Biden-Harris administration.

A featured speaker at the first night of Democratic National Convention, Fain hailed the Democrats as champions of the working class who have stood up for autoworkers against “corporate greed.” He announced that the UAW was filing grievances against Stellantis for “not living up to the contract” and would “do whatever was necessary” to get the auto company to reopen the Belvidere, Illinois assembly plant, which was closed in December 2022.

In fact, the labor agreement, hailed by both Fain and Biden as a historic, job-creating agreement, gave the automakers a green light to destroy thousands of jobs and force workers to bear the costs of the transition to electric vehicles. The collusion of the UAW bureaucracy with the government-corporate attack on jobs and endless militarism has provided Trump, a steadfast enemy of the working class, an opportunity to gain support among workers, including autoworkers, for his fascist “Make America Great Again” demagoguery.

Responding to Fain’s appearance, Will Lehman, a socialist Mack Trucks worker who ran against Fain in the 2022 election, posted the following on X:

The Democratic and Republican conventions this summer have illustrated how rotten and bankrupt both capitalist political parties are. Whether it’s Sean O’Brien backing Trump or Fain endorsing Harris, Harris and Trump represent different factions of the ruling class. The defense of jobs and the rights of working people requires the rank and file to take the initiative ourselves, to link across plants and fight not for what the corporations want, but what we need. Join me in this fight and build rank-and-file committees in your workplace today.

The UAW’s “Keep the Promise” campaign, launched to coincide with Fain’s appearance at the DNC, is nothing but

another publicity stunt cooked up by the Bernie Sanders and Labor Notes supporters in the UAW Communications Department.

It consists of urging workers to file impotent grievances over the cancellation or delay of plans to build a Amazon-style MOPAR parts distribution hub, a stamping plant and a truck assembly plant at the location of the closed Belvidere factory. The UAW campaign web site goes out of its way to say “our goal is NOT to strike” but to “make sure Stellantis fulfills its commitments to invest in America.”

Fain and Biden pointed to the worthless promises to reopen Belvidere as the key selling point for the pro-company contracts. In fact, the agreement included a giant loophole that allows the company to renege on any product commitments or proposed employment levels depending on “plant performance, changes in market conditions, and consumer demand...”

“I read somewhere Fain said he was upset because these cuts go against the agreed upon contract,” said the Kokomo RFC member. “Well if he is so upset and it’s a violation of the contracts what is he doing about it? Why hasn’t he addressed his union brothers and sisters. They’re too busy aiding Kamala Harris who a lot of union members do not endorse. Also, they divided the working members from the newly laid-off workers. This proves the UAW is not interested in unity but division among its workers that only aids the company.

“This is why the RFC is a good idea to show the workers they do not need the UAW apparatus or Fain in order to unite. My opinion is if we are seeing these large assembly plants have massive layoffs it has to trickle down to Kokomo at some point because we are the only city that produces transmissions in the United States for Stellantis.

“[CEO Carlos] Tavares is making it clear he wants our jobs moved outside the US. The RFC is an idea that I think everyone can get behind, no matter what your political beliefs, because it’s a fight against those who are corrupt and in power, from the president of the UAW to the CEOs of the auto companies clear up to the heads of governments.”

Another RFC member said workers at the Kokomo Casting Plant, where Fain got his start as a local union official, were told as many as three-quarters of the workforce could face elimination. She said the committee was encouraging workers to join and build the RFC to transfer decision making and power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor. “People better think about it. People better listen up if they don’t want to discuss politics. It will come down so fast. Stellantis will off other jobs and if they don’t fight it they won’t have benefits or anything.”

Decades of UAW-backed sellouts have led to a staggering erosion in employment levels and living standards in the Indianapolis Metropolitan area. Between 2000 and 2009, the number of automotive manufacturing jobs in Indiana fell from nearly 150,000 to 80,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. After the 2009 bankruptcy restructuring of GM and

Chrysler by the Obama-Biden administration, which halved wages for new hires, automotive employment in the state reached 108,000 in 2022.

The new UAW agreement, however, is paving the way for a new round of massive job cuts. The shift from gas-powered engines and transmissions to batteries and electric motors poses a particular threat to the thousands of workers in Kokomo. The UAW bureaucracy is functioning as a full partner in the destruction of jobs and lowering of labor costs at battery plants, including the Stellantis-Samsung plants in Kokomo.

A fight to defend jobs and living standards can and must be waged but it must be conducted by the workers themselves. It must be guided by the principle that the social rights of the working class—for a secure and good-paying job—must take precedence over the profit drive of the giant transnational corporations. In a statement, the Kokomo Rank-and-File committee wrote: “If EVs require less labor to produce, then it should be used to make our lives better, not worse. We should have our hours reduced with no loss in take-home pay.”

The UAW bureaucracy is once again rolling out economic nationalism to blame the job cuts on “foreign executives” at Stellantis who are “not committed to investing in America.” But workers in every country are facing a global attack on jobs, including in Italy where Stellantis is threatening to cut 25,000 jobs. The only way to fight it is to unite workers across borders against the transnational corporations.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* recently wrote:

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.

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