

Workers across the US attend rank-and-file meeting on Warren Truck layoffs, Dakkota parts strike

Tom Hall
26 August 2024

Take up the fight to save Warren Truck and auto jobs everywhere! Fill out the form below to join the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network.

Over 100 attended Sunday's online meeting, "For global action to defend jobs at Warren Truck and around the world," sponsored by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Workers and supporters from across the US and internationally took part in a crucial discussion on a strategy to fight a two-front war against both management and their accomplices in the union bureaucracy.

A strong delegation attended from striking Dakkota auto parts workers in Chicago. Members of the Dakkota Workers Rank-and-File Committee joined shortly after workers rejected a United Auto Workers-backed sellout deal for the fourth consecutive time, defeating attempts by the union bureaucrats to force them into submission.

The UAW apparatus is desperate to shut down the strike in order to isolate Dakkota workers from workers at Ford's Chicago Assembly Plant—which the plant supplies and which is still running with scab parts—as well as Stellantis workers, who are facing mass layoffs.

In order to get in front of rank-and-file anger, the UAW has issued an insincere threat to strike at Stellantis over the company's renegeing on its plans to reopen its Belvidere plant in Illinois beginning this year.

Describing the efforts by the UAW bureaucracy to repeatedly ram through Dakkota's poverty-wage contract, one worker said during the meeting, "It felt like it was illegal what they did, because they were rushing us to vote. Now we're taking this into our own hands."

Another worker continued, "I'm ready to lose my house [if I have to]. But I want everybody here in the industry to stand with us, stand strong with us around the world, let them know that they cannot continue doing this."

The WSWS will publish longer more extended comments by Dakkota workers, as well as statements from other workers in the meeting, in the coming days.

"Organize in rank-and-file committees, with an international perspective"

The opening report to the meeting were given by Will Lehman, a rank-and-file worker at Mack Trucks who ran on a socialist platform

against UAW President Shawn Fain in the 2022 leadership election.

"We are holding this meeting today to prepare action to stop job cuts and to fight for higher wages throughout the auto industry," Lehman said.

Pointing to the 2,450 layoffs announced by Stellantis at Warren Truck to take effect October 8, he said, "This shows what the 'historic contracts' between the UAW and the Big Three really are. These were concessionary agreements with [concessions] the UAW bureaucracy withheld knowledge of."

The UAW's sellout of the Big Three contract fight has enabled the companies to accelerate their global attack on jobs, affecting autoworkers in every country, he continued. "In Italy, Stellantis is looking to destroy up to 25,000 jobs ... in Germany, Volkswagen is taking measures to reduce capacity."

These are all transnational corporations, which "scour the globe for the most exploitable sources of labor," he continued. "And in each country they use the national trade unions to pit workers against each other," by saying "that jobs can only be secured on the basis of accepting higher exploitation than workers in other countries."

The union bureaucracy "has lost all legitimacy to lead this struggle ... they will enforce the company's dictates until they shutter the plants."

He then turned to the sham election which brought Fain to power, noting he "was elected by about 3 percent of the membership. They didn't want to risk [a fight against the] bureaucracy, for the workers to take power, so they had to suppress any knowledge of the election at all." Over the summer, Lehman won a court ruling in his lawsuit against mass vote suppression. A subsequent statement by the IWA-RFC has called for the election to be re-run, overseen by the rank and file.

When he launched his election campaign, Lehman continued, "We said that one bureaucrat replacing another will not bring about reforms ... so it's up to the workers at all of the plants. What we need to do is organize separately in rank-and-file committees, with an international perspective."

"The question is: What are the workers going to do?"

Lehman's report was followed by comments from Tom Hall, a writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*. "The UAW claimed last Monday that it is prepared to strike over the lack of allocation of

product to the Belvidere Assembly Plant,” Hall began. “To be blunt, you already know what is going to happen as long as it remains in the hands of the bureaucracy: nothing.”

At most, he warned, the bureaucrats might call another limited “standup strike,” like it did last fall with the Big Three, “to let you blow off steam” while working out a deal with even more concessions that workers “would suddenly discover months down the line.”

Even in their posturing over the fate of Belvidere, he continued, they have said nothing about the layoffs at Warren Truck, of the thousands of supplemental workers who have been laid off since the new contract took effect last year. “And why is that? Because all of these layoffs were explicitly signed off on, behind closed doors, by the UAW apparatus.”

The bureaucracy, he continued, was not just in bed with management “but also with the government.” He pointed to Fain’s appearance at the Democratic National Committee, where he promoted Kamala Harris and Joe Biden as “friends” of the working class, while attacking the fascistic Trump as a “scab.”

“It takes one to know one,” Hall retorted. “The bureaucrats run the UAW as a dictatorship, in which workers have absolutely no influence over the actual decisions that are taken which affect their lives, their families and future generations of autoworkers. And if you want fresh proof of that, look no further than what just happened today at Dakkota.

“So we know what the bureaucracy is going to do. The question is: What are the workers going to do?” Citing from a recent statement by the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network on the layoffs at Warren Truck, Hall stressed that the “alternative ... [is] the development of new forms of organization, in opposition to the bureaucratic sellouts, which correspond to the needs of the class struggle in a globally unified, 21st century economy.” These forms are rank-and-file committees.

A wide-ranging discussion followed. The meeting heard from Big Three workers in Southeast Michigan, who spoke about conditions in their plants, especially on the impact of COVID-19. A moving statement was read out from Cheborah Long, the widow of Tywaun Long, who died on the job at Ford’s Dearborn Truck Plant earlier this year.

The meeting also heard a report from K. Nesan, a WSWS reporter from Germany, who spoke on the conditions in the auto industry overseas. He reported on a recent distribution of the German version of the WSWS perspective, “ Stop the mass layoffs at Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant!” at a Stellantis plant in Germany.

“A secure and good-paying job is a basic social right”

The final contribution to the meeting was given by Jerry White, the Socialist Equality Party’s candidate for US Vice President. (On Monday, the SEP learned that its candidates would be placed on the ballot in the key battle ground state of Michigan.)

“This has been a critical and absolutely unique meeting,” White began, that is “part of the growing initiative of rank-and-file workers all over the world, through the work of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.”

White pointed to the death last week of Antonio Gaston, a 53-year-old autoworker at the Stellantis Toledo Jeep plant. “These conditions

are the direct result of the contract signed by the UAW.” The bureaucracy’s claim that it is prepared to strike over Belvidere, he said, is “no more legitimate than their worthless promises to the temporary workers that they would be converted to full-time” but were fired instead.

The problems workers confront are rooted in the “nature of the capitalist system itself,” he continued. “The working class are nothing more than wage slaves. If they die, they are replaced. If they resist, [management] hopes, they will fire and replace them. It is not simply a matter of ‘corporate greed.’ There is no capitalism without corporate greed. The very nature of capitalism is exploitation.”

White and his running mate, Joe Kishore, the SEP’s presidential candidate, “insist that ... a secure and good-paying job is a basic social right which must take precedence over the so-called ‘right’ of the capitalist owners to exploit the workers and throw them out of their jobs.” The bureaucrats, on the other hand, accept the so-called “right” of the corporations to exploit workers.

In summing up, White concluded:

Fain is an asset of the government. He is a state asset. He is being incorporated because the focus of the Democratic Party, above all else, is war—a war for the same corporate interests as those that are waged against workers at home. ... But, of course, workers have no interest in killing workers of other countries or being killed by them. We have every interest in uniting across national borders to defend the right to decent living standards.

So it’s very decisive that, as this meeting has explained, we know what we’re fighting against. No one but the working class ourselves can defend the social rights of the working class. We have to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

So I want to urge you all to join the rank-and-file committees, to build up this opposition, and support [our] campaign so that the working class can fight for its own independent political interests.



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