

Stellantis Warren Truck worker: “If we don’t fight now, they are going to take our jobs”

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The World Socialist Web Site recently held a conversation with a veteran worker from the Stellantis Warren Truck plant in suburban Detroit. On October 8, the company plans to lay off more than 2,500 workers at the factory, as part of its worldwide job cutting campaign. In Italy, Stellantis workers are set to strike on October 18 to oppose plans by the global automaker to cut as many as 12,000 jobs in the country.

The labor agreement signed by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy in late 2023 provided Stellantis, General Motors and Ford with a green light to slash thousands of jobs and force workers to pay the costs of the riskier than expected transition to electric vehicles.

On Tuesday, UAW Local 1700 sent out a notice to members at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant informing them that 177 supplemental or part-time workers were being terminated by September 28. In addition, 14 full-time workers will be laid off indefinitely at the plant, which is located a few miles from Warren Truck.

GM also announced plans to lay off 250 temporary workers at its Fort Wayne, Indiana plant and to terminate 250 temps at its Fairfax Assembly plant in Kansas City, Kansas.

At Fairfax, GM is planning to temporarily lay off roughly 1,450 full-time workers between November and January as the company retools the plant for production of the Chevy Bolt EV and Cadillac XT4 on one assembly line. The company has stated it does not plan to recall workers from the “temporary” layoffs for one year, with production resuming between late 2025 and early 2026.

This reporter held the following discussion with the Warren Truck worker who is using the pseudonym John to protect him from possible retaliation by the company and the UAW bureaucracy.

WSWS: What is the present situation at the Warren Truck plant?

John: We are coming to work in the morning, until October 8. But we don’t know exactly what is going to happen. Nobody knows. Every week they add more names to the list of people being laid off.

Only one shift is working now, there’s no second shift. Last week, it was day shift working in the morning and second shift was laid off. They go weekly. The next week the second shift works but they start in the morning too. The only ones working afternoons are shipping and repair.

WSWS: Does anybody know how many workers are transferring, and who is keeping their jobs?

John: No. In the beginning they said everyone hired after June 24, 2018, would be laid off. This week they put out a new seniority list and more people are going to be out. The people, the union says, have the opportunity to go to SHAP [Sterling Heights Assembly Plant] or the Jeep plant in Toledo, Ohio. But nothing is sure. Toledo is working on and off too. Nobody knows.

At Warren Truck, you hear there is no future for this Wagoneer model. It’s an expensive car. With the economy as it is, nobody is going to buy a

car for \$80,000 and up. How long Warren Truck will stay open, nobody knows.

In the union contract, they promised job security and said they were going to reopen the Belvidere plant. Now, nobody is saying anything. Everything is coming to a head next month.

WSWS: Nobody believes Shawn Fain when he talks about writing grievances, calling a strike and all the rest?

John: No. Nobody trusts the union. Even the local. Before the layoff announcements, we had a steward who worked in chassis and told the people the truth about what was coming. They had a meeting and Local 140 President Eric Graham yelled at the steward, “Why did you tell the people that?” He shouted at him for telling the members about the job cuts that were coming. Even the local works against workers.

Last week, at 1:00 p.m. management came around and told the workers they had to work nine hours. There was a big fight between the workers and management. The supervisors threatened the workers: “If you walk off the line at 2:30 you’re fired.” We’re supposed to be informed at least by lunchtime if they want us to stay an extra hour. They came at the last minute and people rejected that. Management threatened to fire us and the union did nothing.

They write up and suspend people for small things. Fifteen people just got written up in shipping. They trick the workers. A supervisor looks at a car and says it’s okay to ship. When the audit comes back and they find a defect, they blame it on the workers. But we don’t have the gauges and measurements management has.

WSWS: Boeing workers on the picket lines told us they warned management about unsafe procedures, but they were ignored because all the company wanted was to get airplanes out the door. That’s how the door plug on the Boeing jet blew out. Management is under enormous pressure from the top shareholders to cut corners, and that led to hundreds dying.

John: The companies don’t care about quality, only about quantity. “Ok, just ship it.” They want to make money. They don’t care.

I support the Boeing workers 100 percent. They are on the right path. They have to fight because in the end if we don’t stand together, we’re all going to lose our jobs.

WSWS: The International Association of Machinists union bureaucracy have repeatedly extended their contracts, and workers haven’t had a real wage increase in over a decade. In 2014, the company, with the help of the IAM bureaucracy, blackmailed workers into giving up their pensions by threatening to ship their jobs to non-union plants in South Carolina. Now, the workers want their pensions back, and they want at least a 40 percent increase in wages because of the high cost of living.

Boeing has refused. They have pointed to last year’s UAW contract, where workers only got a 25 percent raise over almost five years, to claim that Boeing workers are demanding too much.

John: It’s a game, brother. It’s a game they use against the workers.

Right now, the workers consider ourselves like middle class, but they want to destroy that. The corporations want more money and don't care about us.

WSWS: Workers are learning they are the working class, not middle class. We're wage slaves who can be fired and stripped of our livelihoods if we don't fight.

John: Yes. Where we work, we make this vehicle. Do you think we can afford one? No way. Under the contract, the company has a new lease program for workers. Okay, you get a car. But right now, people are getting laid off, they don't have the seniority and they are getting kicked out of the plant. What happened to those people who got a lease from Stellantis and lost their jobs? They got a letter in the mail telling them to send the truck back.

They put pressure on people losing their jobs. They don't care. The only thing they care for is their business.

WSWS: What is this doing to workers? They know that they may not be able to provide for their families. What is it doing to people?

John: Yeah, if your name is on the list and you have bills, the first thing you think about is how your life is going to change. Do I sell my house? What things do I have to cancel to save on expenses? I have to find another job to put food on the table for my kids.

A lot of workers, especially the ladies, they have kids, and they are 22-23. I see them crying. One girl lived in Ohio and had a long drive to Warren Truck. So, she moved to Sterling Heights with her two kids. Right now, her dreams are gone. She asked me: "What am I going to do? I left my family and moved here to start a new life. Now, I have to go back to Ohio and hopefully my family will open the door for me." You hear a lot of these sad stories. People are breaking apart.

Hopefully, the union will do something. It would be a miracle if one day they would stand and work for the workers, not just sell us words and promises. But we're getting nothing.

WSWS: Well, that's the bitter truth. The unions which once defended workers have become instruments of the corporations and the government. The UAW has lost a million members since 1979, but its assets have risen to over \$1 billion.

John: Did you hear about the worker in Toledo who was killed?

WSWS: Yes. His name was Antonio Gaston and he transferred to Toledo from Belvidere after the UAW did nothing to stop the plant closure.

John: Yes, it's horrible what Stellantis is doing.

WSWS: It is not only Stellantis. Tywaun Long, a 46-year-old Ford worker at the Dearborn Truck Plant, died of a heart attack after he tried to get medical help. It's not just Stellantis, it's capitalism.

The global corporations are saying the industry is plagued with "overcapacity" because the transition to EVs has not been as quick and easy as they thought. Volkswagen is closing plants and planning permanent layoffs in Germany for the first time. The Stellantis workers in Italy are planning a strike on October 18 because of the threat to cut 12,000 jobs. So, it's all the companies, and it's worldwide.

John: Yes, we live in a crazy world, and day after day there are more wars. What Israel is doing in Lebanon is just horrible. I have a co-worker from the Middle East who just lost three cousins in the bombing. He said they were working in a small tile-making factory that the Israelis blew up. If you watch the news, Israel dropped 3,000 bombs and missiles on Lebanon, including 2,000-pound bombs, and this is while they are still killing and starving people in Gaza.

WSWS: Yes, and all these bombs and missiles are supplied by the US and the Biden-Harris administration.

John: Yes, that is why we are disgusted that our tax money is paying for that.

WSWS: These are imperialist wars. They want a war against Iran,

against Russia, and China. Biden was in the UN talking about escalating the war against Russia even if it risks starting a nuclear war. Harris says the US will give Israel all the arms they need to fight Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran, and that she is committed to making sure that the US has the "strongest and most lethal military force in the world."

John: If they were fighting these organizations, you might say it is a "war." But this is not a fight between two armies. They killed 500 people in Lebanon on the first day. They are killing women and children. In Gaza, they've already killed 51,000 people and injured 120,000. Tens of thousands more have not been recovered from the rubble. It's the civilian people who pay the price.

WSWS: They want to fund these wars by cutting public education, Social Security, Medicare and cutting the wages and benefits of workers. Inside the aerospace and defense industry factories, they have ruthless exploitation. Workers are beginning to resist being forced to pay for these endless wars.

The Boeing strike has halted the production and shipment of tankers to refuel Israeli fighter jets, and the Biden administration fears that the continuation of the strike will encourage 45,000 workers on the East Coast and Gulf ports to strike on October 1.

That would disrupt military shipments to Israel and Ukraine and further disrupt corporate profits.

John: That is good news.

WSWS: In all these cases, the workers want to fight but are blocked by the trade union bureaucracies. UAW President Shawn Fain keeps referring to what the union did during World War II as the model for today. They banned strikes and worked with the companies and the government to transform the US economy for war, the so-called "Arsenal of Democracy."

To unite Boeing workers, port workers, autoworkers, it has to be done not from the top but from below, through building rank-and-file committees, workers organizing themselves.

John: Right. I agree with every word you said. To the Boeing workers, I say don't give up. What you are doing right now is going to be for our future, our kids' futures, for the generations to come.

All workers have to be united. If we don't, it will be easy to break us. We have to stand together. We can't fight them if we are divided, and we won't be successful. But if we are united together, our voice is going to be louder, and the community in general will support us.

And this is global, like you said. If the Italian Stellantis workers are going to strike, we should join them to save our jobs too. If something happens in Europe or South America, it is going to affect us here too. If people are losing their jobs anywhere, it affects us all. We are connected together and have to fight together.

I know that it's hard for workers, but we have to take the decision to determine our future. If we don't fight hard now and show them that we are together, they are going to take our jobs. If you have a job, you can pay your bills and take care of your family. If we don't strike to fight for all our jobs, it's going to be, "Hey, you know what, we don't need you anymore."

That is not acceptable. We sacrifice. We leave our houses for 10 hours or more every day. We leave our families and work hard. Who makes the profits for the companies? The workers.

We have to take the decision that we are going to protect our jobs. Otherwise, believe me, in the end they are going to close one plant after another and throw everybody in the streets. They don't care.

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