

As mass layoffs hit Warren Truck and other auto plants, UAW attempts to head off rank-and-file revolt

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With 2,450 workers at Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant (WTAP) facing indefinite layoff this week and more job cuts daily being announced across the auto industry, the United Auto Workers bureaucracy is seeking to head off a rank-and-file revolt and prevent a real fight.

Workers at Warren Truck say UAW officials are keeping them in the dark, with the final day at work for the second shift set for end of week. Workers told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the mood in the plant is tense and angry. Workers are saying final goodbyes as they try to figure out how they can survive on supplemental unemployment benefits since there is little prospect of transfers to other plants. Many are faced with no prospect of future employment in the auto industry.

The impact of the layoffs will be broadly felt as many auto parts supplier plants and other small business in the north Detroit suburbs will be impacted. Declining tax revenues threaten schools and services in local communities.

In recent days, Stellantis has announced other new cuts at several Detroit-area assembly plants. According to the UAW, 191 workers are set to be laid off at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant. This includes 177 temporary workers, known at Stellantis as supplemental employees (SEs), and 14 full-time workers who were recently converted from temporary to regular employees.

At the Detroit Assembly Complex Mack plant, 170 supplemental workers and 36 full-time workers are being laid off. At the Detroit Assembly Complex Jefferson plant, 142 SEs are being terminated, along with 69 full-time employees as of October 1.

The latest layoffs and firings at Stellantis follow the moves by General Motors to “temporarily” lay off 1,695 workers at its Fairfax Assembly plant in Kansas for roughly one year as it retools the factory for electric vehicle production. Two hundred temp workers are being fired at the GM Fort Wayne Assembly Plant.

Meanwhile, the Stellantis Toledo North Assembly Plant is entering the third week of a shutdown. Production of the Jeep Wrangler and Gladiator has been halted, with no firm date for when it will resume.

Strikes at Boeing, East Coast docks part of emerging working class offensive

The conditions for a successful fight back against the layoffs have never been better. The union bureaucracies are on a back foot with the

rebellion by 33,000 Boeing machinists on the West Coast and the beginning of strike action by 45,000 East Coast longshoremen on Monday. The credibility of the UAW apparatus is in tatters, with the lies about a “record” 2023 contract at the Big Three increasingly exposed.

In recent weeks, the UAW faced a record four consecutive contract rejection votes by workers at Dakota auto parts supplier in Chicago and, as well, a growing strike movement among rank-and-file UAW members, such as the walkout at Eaton Aerospace where a picket, Seth Webb, age 24, was tragically struck and killed by a vehicle Saturday night in Jackson, Michigan. Meanwhile, on the West Coast, over 200 Monogram Aerospace workers—who are UAW members and produce parts for Boeing—have been on strike for nearly two months.

In order to diffuse anger over the layoffs, the UAW apparatus and President Shawn Fain have announced a grievance-writing campaign and talked of holding strike votes at different plants over Stellantis’ reneging on its promise to begin reopening Belvidere Assembly in Illinois this year. The premise of this campaign is that the layoffs are in violation of provisions in the “record” 2023 contract. In reality, a record sellout.

However, no strikes votes have actually been held yet, let alone a strike deadline set. Given Stellantis’ stated goal of slashing inventory, anything less than an all-out fight, shutting down the auto industry, would have little impact on the giant multinational company and might even be beneficial to management.

For a real fight to be waged, rank-and-file workers at all the auto plants must take matters into their own hands by building and expanding the network of rank-and-file committees, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. There must be an all-out strike by workers across all the Big Three, as well as supplier plants, to fight all the job cuts and layoffs and provide real job security. This fight is the opposite of the phony “stand up” strike called in 2023, which left workers divided and allowed the companies to continue running full production virtually unimpeded.

The UAW’s “state of the union” town hall: Lies and electioneering for the Democrats

The necessity for such a rebellion was underscored by the UAW “state of the union” livestream event on September 30.

In nearly 90 minutes of remarks, Shawn Fain said nothing about the impending mass layoffs at Warren Truck. To further stifle the voice of workers from the shop floor, not a single worker was present in the audience. Instead, he spoke before a room packed with UAW bureaucrats and staffers who stood and applauded on cue.

The event had two central and interrelated aims. First, Fain attempted to rewrite the record of his administration as having been based on a militant agenda and securing major gains for workers, repeating lies about supposed gains in the 2023 contract that have long since been exposed.

Second, the event had the character of a campaign rally for Kamala Harris and the big business Democratic Party, whom the UAW is expending immense resources to elect.

Significantly, Fain opened with a quotation from former UAW President Douglas Fraser made in 1978, that management was carrying out a one-sided class war. Fain failed to mention that shortly after that Fraser agreed to the first-ever concessions at Chrysler and proceeded to join the company's board of directors, opening the floodgates for a wave of plant closures and an all-out corporate assault on the working class.

When Fain finally spoke about the Stellantis job cuts it was to promote the UAW's bogus "Keep the Promise" campaign. He said nothing about the mass firing of temp workers or the ongoing layoffs at General Motors, Ford, or John Deere. Nor was anything said about the global assault on autoworkers jobs—including plans by Stellantis for over 12,000 layoffs in Italy—and the opposition these attacks are producing among autoworkers all over the world.

Fain only mentioned in passing the postponement of the reopening of the shuttered Belvidere, Illinois, plant and the reported threat to shift production of the Dodge Durango from the Detroit Assembly Complex.

In the supposed fight for Stellantis to "keep the promise," Fain called for unity with car dealerships and Stellantis stockholders, saying nothing about striking Boeing aircraft workers and East Coast longshoremens who are waging a real fight in defense of jobs and living standards.

Fain claimed the attacks on workers flowed from poor corporate leadership by company CEO Carlos Tavares. The layoffs are not the product of poor management, however, but of the crisis of the capitalist profit system. They are part of a global offensive by the capitalist class aimed at offloading the cost of financial bailouts and rampant militarism onto the backs of the working class. All of the auto companies are engaged in ruthless cost cutting as they seek to recoup the cost of the transition to electric vehicle production, while boosting market share and profit margins.

The final 35 minutes of the livestream was largely given over to the promotion of the presidential campaign of Kamala Harris, who Fain absurdly presented as a friend of workers.

While he pointed to plant closings under Trump, he praised the forced bankruptcy and restructuring of the auto industry under President Obama, enforced by the UAW bureaucracy, that led to tens of thousands of layoffs and slashing pay for new hires by 50 percent.

Fain tried to present the Biden-Harris administration as more "patriotic" defenders of the American economy than Trump. Appearing on stage with a "Kill NAFTA" (North American Free Trade Agreement) t-shirt, he claimed that Harris would renegotiate bad trade deals enacted under Trump—effectively parroting the economic nationalist arguments of Trump himself.

This type of poisonous nationalist agitation, long the stock and trade

of the union bureaucracies, serves to divide workers in the US from their class brothers and sisters in Mexico and other countries. At the same time, it strengthens the extreme right and serves to legitimize the efforts by Trump and the Republicans to build a fascist movement based on anti-immigrant hatred.

"We must fight for rank-and-file power"

The disconnect between the anti-worker agenda promoted by Fain and the militant mood of rank-and-file autoworkers found reflection in the comments on the livestream, with anger mounting as the event dragged on.

A few typical comments:

"He is infuriating!! As we all sit here laid off."

"Tell us what you are going to do now. With all the people getting laid off"

"Talk about the damn layoffs."

"Get back to the matter at hand, what are YOU doing to prevent my brothers and sisters from becoming unemployed?"

A worker with four years at WTAP, who faces layoff at the end of the week, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "There definitely needs to be a fight."

Asked her feelings about Shawn Fain and the UAW leadership, she said, "They are working for management. They are playing with our money while my family has to struggle. Everything is so expensive. I am worried how we are going to survive on SUB pay [supplemental unemployment benefits]. It only lasts for 32 months."

In a statement published Tuesday, Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and candidate for president in the 2022 UAW elections, called for uniting the struggle of autoworkers, longshore workers, Boeing workers and other workers in an all-out fight.

"It's clear that we cannot rely on the union bureaucracy or any part of the political establishment, Democrats or Republicans, to defend our interests," Lehman wrote. "We need to take matters into our own hands and build a powerful, independent working-class movement to fight for our rights."

"This is not just about one strike, one contract, or one industry. It is about mobilizing the full power of the working class to fight for a better future for all workers."

Lehman concluded, "We must fight for rank-and-file power, for control over our workplaces and our struggles, and for a real counteroffensive against the corporations and the government."



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