

“We’re treated like numbers”: Boeing, Stellantis lay off thousands as US job cuts mount

Jerry White
13 November 2024

Social anger is growing among workers against mass job cuts and factory closures as automotive, aerospace and other industries accelerate their cost-cutting campaign.

Boeing workers will be told Wednesday who will lose their jobs in the layoff of 17,000 workers the aerospace and defense giant announced last month. According to the *Seattle Times*, the elimination of 10 percent of the company’s global workforce will be “broadly spread across the company, and despite some expectations earlier, engineers and production workers won’t be exempt.” Most of the “US affected employees will be notified mid-November and leave the company on Jan. 17,” a company spokesman said.

“The 17,000 layoffs are for salary,” a Boeing worker who just returned from a seven-week strike by 33,000 machinists told the WSWS. “Some of them got notices already and more to come for them by Monday next week. As for Machinists, we haven’t heard anything yet.” Another worker added, “The talk is about 2,000 people [have] left the company from union side.”

Boeing workers voted down two contract proposals backed by the International Association of Machinists because they failed to meet rank-and-file demands for a 40 percent raise over three years—needed to meet the runaway housing and living costs in the Pacific Northwest—and restore pensions that were robbed from them in 2014. The IAM bureaucracy starved workers on \$250-a-week strike benefits and then forced through a third deal with a 38 percent raise over four years and no pensions.

There is no doubt that IAM officials and Biden’s acting labor secretary Julie Su, who brokered the deal, knew Boeing intended to make machinists pay the costs of the strike through mass layoffs, and they deliberately concealed it. “Boeing decided not to lay off Machinists during the strike, which could have complicated negotiations,” the *Seattle Times* wrote. “However, with the strike ended Nov. 4, some Machinists may also be cut even though Boeing now desperately needs to increase production rates and bring in cash.”

The high cost of living and continuous job cuts, carried out in large part through sellout contracts brokered by the Biden White House, played a central factor in the election of Donald Trump, who was able to exploit the disgust of large sections of workers with Harris and the Democratic Party.

But the newly elected fascist president is compiling an administration of the deepest enemies of the working class, who intend to slash corporate taxes and end any restrictions on capitalist exploitation. Layoffs which have begun under the Biden administration are already beginning to accelerate as the ruling class

declares total war on workers. This poses the need for a struggle by the working class connecting the defense of jobs with a fight against dictatorship.

Auto layoffs

Detroit Three automakers and their suppliers are also stepping up their job-cutting campaign in the aftermath of last year’s labor agreements, which were hailed by United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain and Biden as “historic.” Last week, Chrysler-owner Stellantis announced 1,139 indefinite layoffs at its Toledo Assembly Complex, where workers produce the Gladiator and Wrangler Jeep models. This follows the layoff of up to 2,400 workers at the suburban Detroit Warren Truck Assembly Plant.

Last week, Stellantis said 400 workers at a materials logistics facility that supplies the Detroit Assembly Complex would also be put out of their jobs as the company outsources the Freud St. facility to a third-party contractor.

“The so-called historic contract has been a mess,” Steve, a Toledo Jeep worker who is being laid off, told the WSWS. “Stellantis forced us to work seven days, 10 hours, instead of our regular nine-hour, five-day workweek. Now, they claim they have overproduced.”

Steve said Fain and the UAW International leadership knew that the cuts were coming. “These things are planned years in advance. All it did was allow Fain to claim how great the contract was close to the US presidential election. We were used and abused for 5-6 years, and we didn’t even last one year as full-time. So, basically Stellantis/UAW got rid of the TPT [temporary part-time] problem by firing and laying us off.”

Commenting on the impact of the layoffs, he added, “Financially it will be hard. [Supplemental unemployment benefits] pay gets delayed a week, so that first week you get behind and that makes it hard to catch up. It doesn’t cover all the bills either, with how expensive everything is now. The union hasn’t offered any assistance or anything to help the laid off workers.”

The Toledo layoffs have had an immediate knock-on effect on workers at several supplier companies. Mobis, a third-party corporation that supplies chassis and engine assemblies to the Toledo Assembly Complex, is cutting more than half its workforce.

“An industry that treats its employees like numbers”

In an email to the WSWS, a Mobis worker wrote:

When I first started at Mobis North America in 2012 I believed the job would be my final stop before eventual retirement. However, on Wednesday November 6, 2024, everything I worked 12 long years for was destroyed in a matter of minutes when everyone found out that Stellantis would be cutting Jeep Gladiator down to 1 operating shift. Unfortunately, I will probably not make the cut. Mobis is not Stellantis, we are part of the Toledo Assembly complex, but our shop is small with less than 400 employees, with 210 set to lose their jobs with no safety net. We don't get 2 years of benefits. We get thrown to the curb on January 5th with no severance or benefits along with plenty of other suppliers that are not Stellantis.

I want to express a little humanity along with words of caution for anyone seeking a life in this tumultuous industry. First off, nobody dreams as a child that they want to toil day in day out in an industry that treats its employees like numbers and gives little appreciation for hard work that goes beyond individual title. I was an optimistic child born in Toledo and raised in Waterville. My Dad is a Vietnam era Republican who always hammered a strong work ethic into me, and really instilled the notion into me that if you work hard the world is for the taking. My mom is a retired UTMC (MCO) Pharmacy Tech whose Grandfather was a first generation Polish immigrant who worked at the Jeep Plant in the Golden era of the Automotive industry.

At 43 years of age, I might have to start over again from scratch, because I am just a number. I want my number to be heard. I do have a voice, feelings, family, and personality. I want people to read this and understand that we just want a life like everyone else.

A worker at the nearby Dana Driveline plant said, “I just got back from a two-week layoff, and they cut a whole shift here. I'm a single mother with two kids and unemployment benefits are a joke. You file appeals and stay on the phone for hours. I've skipped paying utility bills, and my credit is crap. Now, Dana is going to take two weeks of my paycheck so I can keep our medical insurance going. I can't get food stamps because they are saying I make too much. I bought my house with this job two years ago, and now I can't afford my house. I had to get a second job. I build Jeeps but I'll never be able to afford one.

“Stellantis is making billions. The billionaires who own these companies don't care, they're sociopaths. Neither one of the political parties cares about us either. As for Fain and the UAW, they're in bed with the company.”

CNH Industries, the maker of Case IH and New Holland tractors, combines and backhoes, has threatened to close its Burlington, Iowa plant and wipe out the jobs of 350 workers. The UK-based transnational said in an email it has given UAW Local 807 officials the “opportunity to engage in the decision bargaining process.” In other words, the UAW bureaucracy, which betrayed an eight-month

strike by CNH workers in Burlington and Racine, Wisconsin in 2022, is now being tasked with blackmailing workers into giving up more concessions.

Other companies announcing mass layoffs this month include PPG Industries, which is cutting 1,800 jobs, or 4 percent of its workforce in the US and Europe; Sumitomo Tire, which abruptly shut its plant in Tonawanda, New York, wiping out 1,550 jobs; and Cabinetworks Group, which will close its factory in Thompsontown, Pennsylvania this December, laying off 420 workers.

Global counter-campaign needed

The stage is being set for tremendous class struggles in the United States, as the ruling class moves, through Trump, towards open dictatorship to deal with the threat from the working class. Workers must prepare themselves by building an independent movement opposed to both parties and to the pro-corporate union bureaucracy.

This requires the unity of workers from the United States and around the world. The cuts in the US are part of a global jobs massacre, including tens of thousands of jobs by VW and Audi in Germany and Belgium, 9,000 jobs by Nissan, and thousands of jobs by GM, VW and Honda in China. As it moves in each country to carry out mass layoffs, the corporate elite is also moving sharply to the right and dispensing with democratic forms of rule.

Last month, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees issued a call for a global campaign against the job cuts in auto and other industries. “The massive attacks by transnational corporations, aided and abetted by the trade union bureaucracy, must be answered by mobilizing the power of the international working class,” the IWA-RFC statement declared.

The ground for this global campaign, including worldwide pickets and rallies and culminating in international strike action, must be prepared by establishing lines of communication between workers in the US, Germany and other countries. As the IWA-RFC statement explained: “Rank-and-file committees among autoworkers in both North America and Europe must be expanded to include every key factory, giving workers the power to shut down the global industry.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact