UAW president in damage control as rank-and-file anger mounts over Stellantis layoffs

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United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain is in full damage control mode, visiting union locals in Michigan and Ohio over the last several days in an effort to beat back a rising tide of rank-and-file opposition to mounting job cuts by Stellantis. According to the *Detroit News*, the automaker has laid off nearly 4,000 workers in the Detroit and Toledo metro areas since September alone.

New job cut announcements are virtually a daily occurrence. In January, 1,139 workers will be laid off at the Toledo Assembly Complex when production of the Jeep Gladiator is reduced to one shift. This follows 1,300 layoffs at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant in early October, the first of as many as 2,400 job cuts as the suburban Detroit plant reduces production to one shift.

Workers informed the *World Socialist Web Site* that 250 workers were just laid off at the Indiana Transmission Plant in Kokomo, Indiana. Another 500 workers at the Kokomo Casting Plant are currently laid off.

In addition, at least 400 workers have been laid off at Detroit Assembly Complex-Mack; 400 are set to lose their jobs at a Detroit logistics facility when Stellantis outsources its operations to a third party; and 160 have been laid off at Warren Stamping. The *Detroit News* says its estimate of job cuts is "conservative" because it does not include 500 temporary part-time employees recently fired by Stellantis and hundreds of workers laid off at part suppliers like Dana and Mobis.

Even as these job cuts hit, the UAW is allowing Stellantis to force remaining workers to work overtime. "Despite the company complaining orders are down and they need to lay off people, they are forcing us to work nine hours a day, probably six days this week," Steve, a worker at the Toledo complex, told the WSWS.

"They're forcing OT, while at the same time saying they need to cut inventory and lay people off. The UAW lets them do it. It makes no sense. We are going to work ourselves out of jobs. There's a rumor that after Thanksgiving, they could lay everyone off again for a week or two. Why are they forcing OT if they need to do temporary layoffs in a few weeks?"

This was echoed by a member of the Stellantis Kokomo Rank-and-File Committee—that was formed to oppose the UAW bureaucracy's sellout of the 2023 contract fight. "It sounds to me like if they're working everyone as much overtime as they can right before the layoff. They've already posted 9 hours every day, and now they're talking about forcing Saturday. Basically, they're forcing us to work 52 hours a week to stockpile transmissions, after laying all those people off."

Under the UAW contract, workers on indefinite layoffs are supposed to receive state unemployment benefits, plus supplemental unemployment benefits (SUB) from Stellantis. This would bring them up to 74 percent of their regular pay. But in many cases, state agencies have delayed the issuing of unemployment benefits, meaning workers also do not get SUB pay.

Fain and the UAW bureaucracy are fully responsible for this disaster. First, they defied the unanimous vote by the rank and file for an all-out strike by all 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers. Instead, they conducted a phony "stand up" strike that kept two-thirds of the members on the job producing profits. Then they rammed through a sellout contract based on lies that it would convert temporary part-time workers to get full-time positions and provide job commitments and a "fair transition" to electric vehicles. Instead, it paved the way for the mass firing of temporary workers and thousands of layoffs for full-time workers.

For an international fight to defend jobs

The fight to defend jobs can only succeed if workers unite across national boundaries in a common fight against the global automakers. The mass layoffs in the US are part of a global jobs massacre, including tens of thousands of jobs at VW in Germany, 9,000 jobs by Nissan in Asia and mass layoffs by VW, GM and Honda in China. Stellantis is also threatening to eliminate 12,000 jobs in Italy and close two Vauxhall plants in the United Kingdom.

In the aftermath of the VW announcement, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) issued a call for a global campaign to defend the right to secure and good-paying jobs for all workers. This includes the coordination of mass demonstrations and strike action by autoworkers, along with other sections of workers, including at Boeing where 17,000 jobs are being cut. This fight requires the expansion of rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace to transfer power from the union bureaucracy to the workers on the shop floor.

But the defense of the right to a job is only possible if workers reject the "right" of the capitalist owners to privately control the

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plants and do with them as they see fit. The absurdity of capitalism is revealed by the fact that millions of workers face unemployment and starvation because they have produced "too much."

This can only be changed when the auto industry is put under public ownership and the democratic control of the working class as part of a socialist planned economy on a world scale. Then, the riches produced by the working class can be used to vastly improve the living standards of all workers.

The bogus "Keep the Promise" campaign

To cover the tracks of the UAW bureaucracy, Fain has employed a coterie of Democratic Socialists of America operatives and former Bernie Sanders campaign directors on the UAW staff to promote the bogus "Keep the Promise" campaign, which charges Stellantis is reneging on its worthless job promises. Rather than taking any collective action to halt production, the campaign consists of impotent grievance filings and votes to authorize the UAW International to call strikes, which it has no intention of calling.

In the months leading up to the US presidential elections, the "Keep the Promise" campaign was used as a platform to promote the election of Kamala Harris, claiming this warmonger and life-long corporate shill would advance the fight for workers' jobs and rights. Following the election of Trump, Fain has pressed ahead with his campaign, now tailoring it to Trump's anti-Chinese and anti-Mexican economic nationalism.

In a November 14 letter, Kevin Gotinsky, head of the UAW's Stellantis Department, declared, "These indefinite layoffs are unacceptable, and we will do everything in our power to fight them where they violate our contract. We are also taking action to make sure jobs stop leaving the country under broken federal trade agreements and we are going to have to fight on multiple fronts to save this company from itself."

Like Fain, Gotinsky blamed the layoffs on the "foreign" executives of Stellantis plants while claiming that US-based Ford and GM "are doing just fine." In fact, just last week, GM announced it was cutting 1,000 salaried positions, including UAW members at the GM Tech Center in Warren, Michigan. The company has also fired hundreds of temporary workers. As for Ford, it has cut two shifts at its Rouge Electric Vehicle Center in Dearborn, Michigan, and is shutting the facility for at least two months.

So far, only three local UAW unions have authorized strike action, including small locals at Los Angeles and Denver parts depots and at the closed assembly plant in Belvidere, Illinois. Workers at the Kokomo Casting plant failed to authorize a strike. Gotinsky admitted that "half the membership did not vote" at Fain's own home local, UAW Local 1166, without admitting that this was largely a vote of no confidence in the UAW bureaucracy.

Gotinsky even suggested that production cutbacks and layoffs had actually strengthened the position of workers! "Inventory going down means they will need you to build cars in 2025. That means we will have more leverage to enforce our contract."

But the UAW has no intention of calling a strike anytime soon, if at all. "Expect more strike authorization votes in early 2025—there is no chance of a strike during the holidays," Gotinsky said, adding, "We will be taking time over the coming months to discuss the importance of this fight at our plant gates, breakrooms and local union halls."

The meetings on Sunday with Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) workers in suburban Detroit and the Toledo Jeep plant on Tuesday were relatively small. "Fain was campaigning for his strike and selling dreams again," a SHAP worker, who attended the Local 1700 meeting, told the WSWS. "He blamed the layoffs on the economy and said we couldn't do much about low car sales. When he tried to blame (former Stellantis department head) Richard Boyer for the bad contract, a worker pushed back, saying Boyer affirmed Fain and the rest of the International were in on the deal."

Reporting on what the UAW bureaucracy was doing to contain opposition in Indiana, the Stellantis Kokomo Rank-and-File Committee member said, "They are going to refile the grievances; it's the only thing I've seen." When the temporary workers were fired, Fain's Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) faction urged workers to sign a petition to defend them. "That's what they always do, file a grievance or tell you to sign a petition. But I've never heard anything else about the last one."

A worker at the Toledo Mobis plant, where half of the 400 workers face layoffs, told the WSWS, "We feel like the rug has been pulled out from under us. Fain came across like a warrior at first, and we thought maybe this was somebody with substance who we could believe in. But he's against us.

"Since the end of the elections, we've hardly heard anything from the top brass of the UAW. Harris talked about 'middle class workers,' but she meant surgeons making $300,000, not anyone I know who is losing their job and can't afford groceries.

"So many workers voted for Trump because they were lost and angry, and angry people do stupid things. Now, you're going to have this Rambo capitalism and a government that is modeled on Mussolini. They're going to try to shove this 'trickle down' stuff down our throats while we lose our jobs. Well, I'm not going to take it, and, if workers understand their history, they aren't going to take it either."

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