

Despite reprieve for Stellantis workers in Toledo, threats to jobs remain

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In early November of 2024, 1,134 autoworkers at the Stellantis Jeep complex in Toledo, Ohio were given notice that they were to be laid off in January 2025. In an abrupt reversal, and after nearly two months of uncertainty, Stellantis announced that the layoffs had been rescinded.

The shelving of the layoffs at Toledo Jeep is part of a broader reinvestment strategy being initiated by Stellantis at multiple plants across the US. The plans include the reopening of the idled Belvidere Assembly Complex in Illinois, the production of the new Dodge Durango SUV model at Detroit Assembly Complex, and facility investments in the Stellantis Kokomo plant to produce GMET4EVO engines.

It takes place under the looming threat of economic dislocation, including the imposition of massive tariffs on Canadian and Mexican goods by the Trump administration and the eruption of full-scale trade war.

The initial layoffs in Toledo were announced under former Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares, ostensibly as a response to a decline in Jeep sales. The drastic cuts also impacted workers at the adjacent Mobis and Kuka supplier plants, who were told that 210 and 160 layoffs were to be made, respectively. Subsequently Stellantis told the workers they could come back as “supplemental employees” with half the pay and virtually no benefits.

In early December, Tavares announced his resignation as CEO. Although Tavares was justly despised by workers, his departure did not signify any letup in the company’s ruthless drive to push the cost of the transition to electric vehicle production onto the backs of workers.

This did not prevent UAW president Shawn Fain from seeking to frame Tavares’ resignation as a victory for workers. In a December statement, the UAW

claimed, “For weeks, thousands of UAW members at Stellantis have been calling for the company to fire Tavares due to his reckless mismanagement of the company. We are pleased to see the company responding to pressure and correcting course.”

The statement continued, “We look forward to continuing this progress in honoring our contract with new Stellantis leadership that respects hardworking UAW members and is ready to keep its promise to America by investing in the people who build its products.”

Echoing Fain’s praise of Stellantis management, Bruce Baumhower, president of UAW Local 12 at Toledo Jeep, claimed in a recent interview that, “New leadership comes in, lowers prices, and dealers are happy, and we’re happy,” adding, “It’s all changed dramatically. It’s all for the good.”

Fain also took Tavares’ resignation as the occasion to call off the UAW’s phony “Keep the Promise” campaign. The campaign was initiated in the face of enormous rank-and-file anger over the betrayal of the 2023 auto strikes, which were followed by a wave of attacks on jobs. The campaign involved the writing of grievances and the holding of a few symbolic strike votes, but no actual strikes.

While claiming “victory,” the UAW has dropped any fight to recall the thousands of laid off workers. The reality is that the vast majority of job cuts carried out by Stellantis over the past year at Warren Truck in suburban Detroit and other plants still remain in place.

In another move to deflect anger over the job cuts, including the firing of hundreds of temporary workers who had been falsely promised full time jobs under the 2023 agreement, Fain removed UAW Vice President Rich Boyer as head of the Stellantis department, making him the scapegoat for the mass firings.

Stellantis' decision to at least for now rescind some layoffs and make limited reinvestment has little to do with the character of Stellantis' leadership and more to do with broader economic factors. It is certainly not driven by any concern for the well-being of workers.

As Jeep workers are aware, Stellantis' drive for profits and neglect of safety contributed to the death of 53-year-old Antonio Gaston on August 21. Despite being cited for serious safety violations, Stellantis was fined a mere \$16,000 for Gaston's death.

The recent announcement that thousands of Jeep workers in Brampton, Ontario will be left without jobs is a prime example of this. As a part of their 2023 contract, Canadian union Unifor obtained a pledge by Stellantis to retool and reopen the plant, recalling some 2,200 workers in 2026 to produce a new electric vehicle. Stellantis recently announced that it now plans to push back the re-opening of the plant for as long as one year.

Because of its highly integrated nature, the auto industry in North America faces severe disruption by Trump's plans for steep tariffs on Canada and Mexico. Even Ford CEO Jim Farley admits such tariffs will "blow a hole" in the entire auto industry and will completely disrupt the push to increase the production of electric vehicles. According to Farley, there is currently a "global street fight" in the auto industry against China to develop lower-cost EV technologies.

The first month of Trump's second term has made it clear that his administration is no friend to workers. Despite the now obvious attempt by Trump and his hatchet man, billionaire Elon Musk, to dismantle what remains of American democracy, the UAW bureaucracy has continued to endorse the Trump administration's program of tariffs and trade war—falsely claiming that this will defend workers' jobs.

The attack on workers in Brampton is a warning of what is to come. Based on the UAW's corporatist "America First" agenda, the delay in the reopening of the Brampton plant is of no concern to American workers and may even be to their benefit. Workers must not believe this lie nor allow the UAW and Unifor in Canada, acting at the behest of the auto bosses, to pit workers in different countries against each other.

Instead, workers must map out a global strategy to defend jobs against the drive of all the transnational

auto companies to slash costs. Workers across Canada, Mexico, and the United States all face a common fight against common enemies.

To defend jobs, decent pay and safe working conditions, the IWA-RFC (International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees) must be built and expanded in all workplaces across North America and internationally. These committees, democratically run by workers, will map out a program of struggle and forge links between workers in different factories and industries to carry out the broadest collective mobilization.



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