

Autoworkers oppose UAW backing of Trump tariffs and coming job cuts

WSWS reporting team
4 March 2025

As the Trump administration's steep tariffs went into effect Tuesday and Canada and China retaliated with counter-tariffs, concern spread throughout auto plants over the impact on jobs in the globally integrated industry. Industry spokesmen say the 25 percent tariffs on most imports from Canada and Mexico could lead to widespread layoffs throughout North America in as early as one week.

Oblivious to the impact on autoworkers, the United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain issued a statement endorsing the tariffs, calling them "a powerful tool in the toolbox for undoing the injustice of anti-worker trade deals."

Fain falsely claimed that the fascist president, who has been waging a war against immigrants, federal workers and essential social programs, was acting on behalf of workers. "We look forward to working with the White House to shape the auto tariffs in April to benefit the working class," Fain said.

In response, a veteran Stellantis worker in Detroit said, "A powerful tool in the tool box is to tax the one-tenth of one percent who avoid paying taxes."

A worker at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit told the WSWS, "This move is not going to be a good one! People are already struggling with the cost of living, and this will push people to the brink. Food prices and a lot of other essential items will be hard to afford." Pointing to the logic of trade wars, the worker added, "I personally have felt we're on the verge of seeing World War III coming."

A worker from the Stellantis Jeep plant in Toledo, Ohio, said Fain was cozying up to Trump. He said:

The UAW leadership doesn't speak for everyone. They put statements out on everyone's behalf, but that is not everyone's sentiment. What everybody really feels is that the UAW leadership has their own agenda.

They tricked younger workers with this "work-life balance" talk. Now we make more money but take

home less in our checks, and we still don't see our families. The leadership doesn't make me feel they're into my interests. They make me feel like they're in to get a seat at somebody's table. People say Fain is trying to move on and get into politics, maybe in the Republican Party.

Mexican auto parts worker: "The financial damage will be on both sides of the border"

Workers from Mexico also spoke to the WSWS. Julian, an auto parts worker in Matamoros, Mexico, said Trump's claim that tariffs are aimed at combatting drug trafficking is "just a pretext." The US president "is running his country like a business and wants to be self-sufficient regardless of the damage it causes to its inhabitants. He is a cunning but his power has limits, and he is not a king."

Julian was among those who participated in the historic 2019 wildcat strikes against the union bureaucracy and transnational corporations in Matamoros when thousands marched to the border with Brownsville, Texas, to call on American workers to "wake up" and join their struggle. Julian said:

The financial damage will be on both sides, and Mexico also has means to respond and will not stand idly by. We need to be prepared for the breaking of trade agreements, and now all the workers of both the United States and Mexico must show what we are made of.

It is not about patriotism, it is about how we can cushion the conflicts between our rulers and secure more income for our families. We will have a big

blow in the auto, mining and other industries, regarding unemployment. To extend our power as workers, let's make alliances and not divisions. We are the force and strength of our countries. Unity and strength for workers!

A Toledo Jeep worker said, "They threatened us with 1,200 layoffs already," referring to the recently rescinded threat by Stellantis to axe jobs at the plant. "Whatever caused the initial layoffs could still happen. On top of that you have these tariffs, sales are down anyway. If the prices are too high with these tariffs, ultimately the cost will be put on the consumer. I anticipate layoffs."

He continued:

Many people were happy that Trump won because he talked about keeping gas cars and doing away with EVs. They thought that their jobs making gas engines would be safe. But they did not realize all the other things that were going to come.

Trump lies so much, people began to say "That's just Trump, he doesn't mean that stuff." He does mean it. He is trying to turn himself into a dictator. Sometimes it takes a catastrophe for people to say, "I made a mistake." For the people who voted for Trump, the tariffs are going to affect them because they have more to lose. The farmers are getting hurt too.

A worker from the Ventra auto parts plant in Ewart, Michigan, said workers at his shop were very concerned about the tariffs:

My shop just laid me off for two weeks due to the shutdown at Ford Michigan Assembly Plant. They knew these tariffs were coming. The union knew it all along, and they did nothing to protect our jobs. They just said plan on being off for weeks, and there's nothing we can do about it.

A Ford worker from Dearborn Truck Plant said:

Trump is not defending our jobs. Fain and the UAW are not defending us. They are creating chaos. Both of them are supporting Ford and Ford's profits.

Workers everywhere do not want another war. We need a new system that will protect all of humanity and provide for human needs.

Unite US, Canadian and Mexican workers

In response to the UAW's support for Trump's tariffs, socialist Mack Trucks autoworker and former candidate for UAW president Will Lehman issued a statement, which said in part:

The trade war measures backed by the UAW bureaucracy are aimed at dividing American workers from their brothers and sisters in Mexico, Canada and China, strengthening the position of American corporate giants and preparing WWII.

How can American workers win the support of Mexican and Canadian workers for a fight against the transnational corporations if they support trade tariffs that would toss thousands of these workers onto the unemployment lines?

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) rejects the attempts by the UAW bureaucracy to line workers up behind "our" capitalist exploiters. Instead, the IWA-RFC fights for the unity of workers throughout North America and the world in a common fight to defend the jobs and living standards of all workers.

This means expanding the network of autoworkers rank-and-file committees whose aim is to abolish the UAW bureaucracy and transfer power from the union apparatus to shop floor workers.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact