

Michigan autoworkers speak on tariffs as Stellantis pauses production of Jeep Grand Cherokee in Detroit

Shannon Jones
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US autoworkers remain on pins and needles amid uncertainty over the impact of the trade war launched by President Trump against the rest of the world. While many of Trump's threatened "Liberation Day" tariffs have been temporarily postponed, the tariffs on imported auto parts are set to take effect May 3.

In the face of intense lobbying by the auto companies, Trump said auto parts would be exempted from the tariffs imposed on China over fentanyl. Tariffs on steel and aluminum would also be eliminated for auto parts in what is called "destacking."

At the same time, UAW President Shawn Fain has remained firm in his support for the Trump administration's tariffs while attempting either to ignore or downplay the recent layoffs. Fain has also done everything to prevent the mobilization of autoworkers against the administration's continuing arrest and disappearances of students and immigrants, including former UAW member and Columbia University anti-genocide activist Mahmoud Khalil.

In the latest announcement of layoffs, Stellantis reported it is halting production at its Detroit Assembly Complex—both Mack and Jefferson—for one week starting April 27. Mack will also be shut down for a week later in May. Both facilities produce the Jeep Grand Cherokee.

Last week, Volvo Group North America announced plans to lay off hundreds of workers at its Mack Trucks and Volvo Trucks plants in Macungie, Pennsylvania; Virginia and Maryland. The layoffs will take place over the next three months. Management said the layoffs are needed to "align production with reduced demand" with Trump's tariffs taking effect. Another 1,300 workers at supplier plants will be affected.

Stellantis recalled both shifts at its idled Windsor Assembly plant for the weeks of April 21 and April 28 but did not provide any clarity on production operations beyond those two weeks. Some of the 900 components workers in Michigan and Indiana whom it laid off earlier this month also returned to work. One thousand workers at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant remain on temporary layoff, as well as 200 workers at GM's Factory Zero in Detroit.

In the wake of the launch of trade war and stepped up attacks on jobs, Mack Trucks worker and socialist Will Lehman, who ran in 2022 for UAW president, issued a statement calling for the building of rank-and-file committees as part of the International

Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Lehman stated:

What Shawn Fain is doing—lining up behind Trump's tariffs—is a betrayal. These tariffs are not just about economics. They're laying the groundwork for a shooting war with China. The goal is to disconnect from the globally integrated economy. But workers know better. We see every day where parts are made, where they come from. This isn't about "bringing jobs home."

It's an illusion. It's an attempt to build a nationalist alternative to the global economy that simply cannot work. We won't win by aligning with these nationalist maneuvers. We need to reach out to our class counterparts everywhere, internationally, if we're going to defeat transnational corporations.

The autoworkers around the world, including in China, are coming into struggle, underscoring the need to reject economic nationalism and unite workers across borders. According to the *China Labor Bulletin*, thousands of workers at electric vehicle giant BYD walked off the job at factories in Wuxi and Chengdu in late March and early April 2025, protesting steep pay cuts and deteriorating working conditions.

The impact of the tariffs will be felt at all levels of the automotive supply chain. Workers at part supplier plants, who already labor under some of the worst conditions, stand to be hit the hardest.

A letter sent to Trump and signed by a broad coalition of auto industry groups, including both domestic and foreign manufacturers warned, "Most auto suppliers are not capitalized for an abrupt tariff-induced disruption. Many are already in distress and will face production stoppages, layoffs and bankruptcy," the letter added, noting "it only takes the failure of one supplier to lead to a shutdown of an automaker's production line."

According to industry group Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association (MEMA), the US auto parts sector accounts for 4.8 million jobs in the US. The average vehicle has 30,000 parts, produced by an expansive chain of suppliers spread over a global

network. The potential disruption caused by the trade war is therefore massive.

The tariffs also have the potential to significantly push up new vehicle prices under conditions where US consumers are already struggling with record levels of debt.

Autoworkers in Michigan contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* spoke out both on Trump's tariffs and the role of Fain and the UAW bureaucracy. As the repeated references made by Fain to the World War II role of the UAW in the "Arsenal of Democracy" make clear, the driving force of the tariffs is not the concern over providing more jobs to US workers but the building of a Fortress America to pursue war overseas, particularly against China.

A worker at Warren Truck said:

It's not acceptable to genocide people to get beach front property. Now they are trying to start a war with Iran. They are making it illegal to talk about Zionism. These politicians are all in bed because they want that money.

They are letting their real intentions slip out, which is taking Social Security. Since they eroded the manufacturing base, they don't need so many workers.

A worker at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) said:

The tariffs aren't right. I want everyone to work, everyone to have a job. It's affecting the American people badly.

A younger (SHAP) worker added:

My thoughts on the trade war? It's making us more vulnerable as a country and internationally. A lot of production is international. The trade war is obviously separating the people here in America and internationally. It's making us more vulnerable as humans in general. And just watching this now, with people's jobs on the line, with my job on the line, it's not a comfortable situation to be in.

I'm fresh out of high school, college, and there's one thing in this world that should be guaranteed—your life, the way you live, your job, being able to take care of yourself. They're taking away everything.

Another worker pointed to the fact that Trump was elected because he promised to address inflation and layoffs, but now workers were losing their jobs. Pointing to the corporate control of the whole political system, she said, "It's not about people, it's about money and power, and that's the sad part."

Asked about her thoughts on uniting with Mexican and Canadian

workers, she said:

I think the more we unite, the more powerful we become. The whole purpose of politics seems to keep us divided. Once we realize we are stronger united, we are unstoppable.

Despite the production cuts, earlier this month Stellantis approved a \$2.26 billion shareholder dividend to be paid on May 5. The decision to enrich shareholders came despite the fact that profit-sharing checks for US Stellantis production workers were down 73 percent from last year.

A worker at the Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn told the WSW:

A whole lot of people have been laid off since Trump started this trade war. I know for a fact it's going to hit Rouge at some point. They laid off thousands before any of the tariffs popped off. Many workers were forced to go over to Michigan Assembly, and now those guys are laid off.

Shawn Fain is pitching (the tariffs) as if it's going to revive American industry, create jobs for workers and higher living standards. That's not what's happening.

America is based on a massive debt that is collapsing. The federal debt is \$37 trillion, and the interest on it is \$1 trillion per year. People that control the technology have become billionaires. Some individuals are currently richer than entire countries. They only want more money for themselves.

The defense of jobs and living standards requires the building of a rank-and-file movement independent of the UAW bureaucracy and both capitalist parties. This fight must be guided by a socialist and internationalist perspective to mobilize the great power of the working class across national borders in opposition to the attempt by capitalist politicians and the UAW bureaucracy to pit workers in different countries against each other.

To join the fight to build rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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