

# UAW holding strike vote at Sterling Heights Assembly over outsourcing, as Stellantis gears for more cost cutting

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Local United Auto Workers officials have set a strike authorization vote on May 7 and 8 over the outsourcing of skilled trades work at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) in metropolitan Detroit. The strike vote called by the Local 1700 leadership does not mean workers will actually strike. No strike deadline has been set and no list of demands issued. Before any walkout takes place, moreover, the local must get authorization from the UAW International Executive Board.

According to a report in *Bloomberg Business*, [UAW Local 1700 President Mike Spencer] “stated he has been talking to the maker of Jeep SUVs and Chrysler minivans for more than a year about concerns that Stellantis is hiring outside contractors to do work inside the plant, rather than allowing 600 skilled tradespeople to bid on the work, as required by their contract. The union announced the vote in a video podcast to members Friday.”

About 6,000 workers are employed at SHAP, which produces the highly profitable Ram 1500 pickups. The plant is reportedly running at full capacity as Stellantis seeks a profit turnaround from 2025. The company reported a first-quarter net profit of \$443 million on April 30, largely due to a credit for refund of Trump’s tariffs.

Last month, Stellantis CEO Antonio Filosa stated he is launching a global cost-cutting plan, dubbed the Value Creation Program, or VCP. Filosa says the initiative will be “ambitious” and focused on North America and Europe, without providing further details.

In the past local strike votes have been taken by the UAW as a means of venting rank-and-file anger and have not led to any meaningful action. In April 2024, for example, workers at the nearby Warren Truck Stamping Plant voted by 72 percent to strike over health and safety issues. The UAW bureaucracy ignored the mandate and

cut a deal, which workers said did not address their safety concerns.

SHAP workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* expressed deep anger at Fain and the UAW apparatus. They reported that new low-paid temporary workers were being hired, while thousands of full-time Stellantis workers remain on indefinite layoff.

“The local president made the decision to call the strike vote,” one worker said. “But Shawn Fain and his Stand Up slate are going to use it for their campaign,” he said, referring to widely despised UAW president’s bid for reelection this year.

Many workers posting on Facebook expressed skepticism about the call for a strike vote, suggesting it is purely performative. A number pointed to the fact that the 2023 national UAW contract did not seriously address the outsourcing of skilled trades work. One said the supposed contract restrictions on outsourcing are “shot through with more holes than a piece of Swiss cheese.”

The present language does not ban subcontracting of skilled trades work. Instead, it establishes a requirement for advance notice and consultation as part of a “joint review” process involving UAW officials and management. It also includes an “emergency” loophole big enough to drive a truck through.

In a statement on the upcoming strike vote, Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker from Macungie, Pennsylvania who is running for UAW president, said:

Workers at SHAP are right to be angry and ready to fight outsourcing and job cuts. But that fight will go nowhere if it is left in the hands of the UAW bureaucracy. Workers have been down that road before—and it has led to concession after

concession.

The Ram 1500 is creating enormous profits for Stellantis, sweated off the labor of SHAP workers. Shawn Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy will do nothing that will interrupt the flow of profits to management because a portion of that gets funneled back to them.

Outsourcing didn't just appear—It was made possible by what the union already conceded. Now skilled trades workers are being targeted, and tomorrow it will be everyone else. The strategy is obvious: Divide workers, isolate one group at a time and drive down conditions for all.

The current contract language sanctions outsourcing and only requires that the UAW be consulted. This allows the union to bid against outside contractors for work, forcing workers into a race to the bottom, where the “winner” is whoever accepts the lowest wages and worst conditions. This has never saved jobs. It has destroyed them—tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands over the past decades.

The UAW bureaucracy kept this language in the 2023 sellout contract signed by Fain and supported by Rick Boyer, Margaret Mock, LaShawn English and every other UAW official. After this rotten deal led to the firing of TPTs and mass layoffs, Fain launched his phony “Keep the Promise” campaign, which included a series of strike votes that did not result in a single strike. Belvidere Assembly is still closed and may never reopen. Thousands remain on layoff, and brutal speedup and cutting corners on safety have led to the deaths of Stellantis brothers Ronald Adams Sr. at Dundee Engine and Antonio Gaston at Toledo Assembly, along with Gregory Knopf at Ford Sharonville Transmission.

At the same time, Fain has backed Trump's tariffs and sought to divide American workers from our brothers and sisters in Canada, Mexico and other countries. But economic nationalism only leads to trade war and shooting war, as we see with Trump's criminal war against Iran, which has not only driven up gas prices but threatens to drag our children off to war.

If workers want to defend their jobs, they need to take matters into their own hands. That means organizing independently, uniting across all divisions in the US and internationally, and

preparing to fight on their own terms—not waiting for approval from a bureaucracy that is already preparing the next sellout.

This means building rank-and-file committees controlled democratically by workers ourselves. We should be the ones who decide when to strike and what demands to raise. Any other strategy can only lead to workers being betrayed once again. It requires a collective struggle led by the rank and file, not just at SHAP but across Stellantis and the auto industry, with our working class brothers and sisters internationally.

The decision by Local 1700 leaders to schedule a strike vote takes place amid mounting provocations by management. Workers are still fuming over the decision by Stellantis to withhold profit sharing checks for 2025, imposing financial hardship on workers whose paychecks are being daily diminished by inflation, including fuel costs that have hit \$4.80 a gallon in the metro Detroit area.

It follows the recent move by Stellantis to bring police dogs into SHAP, ostensibly to sniff for weapons. The program is set to be extended to other plants, including the Toledo Jeep complex and Mack Assembly in Detroit. In a statement Stellantis said the dogs and their handlers are there to “support workplace safety and employee well-being.”

Local 1700 officials have said nothing about the searches, which are a flagrant act of intimidation.

The K-9 patrols recall the unannounced police searches initiated last year by Ford using the excuse of illegal drugs and the supposed theft of auto parts. The searches led to the victimization of workers, who tried to stand up for their democratic rights. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) issued a statement denouncing the searches pointing out that Ford's “supposed concerns about workers' safety come from a profit-hungry corporation that subjects workers to physical and mental abuse every day.”



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