FIGHT BACK AGAINST THE ATTACK ON JOBS AT STELLANTIS BELVIDERE ASSEMBLY! MOBILIZE SUPPORT BEHIND STELLANTIS WORKERS!



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

To discuss forming a rank-and-file committee or to speak out about your working conditions, contact my campaign today: *willforuawpresident@gmail.com*.

Dear Fellow Workers,

Stellantis announced last year that it would indefinitely idle its Belvidere Jeep Assembly Plant in Illinois by the end of February and lay off the remaining 1,200 workers. This is the latest attack on workers' jobs, part of a global restructuring of the auto industry, as the corporations prepare for the 2023 Big Three contract talks this year.

The auto companies have repeatedly made record profits in recent years. What gives them the right to sacrifice our jobs and our livelihoods at their altar of profit? We cannot accept such corporate terrorism any longer and it's high time we fight back, even if the UAW apparatus does nothing to fight for us. An injury to workers at Stellantis is an injury to all workers in the auto industry and beyond.

I call on workers throughout the UAW to link up with our fellow workers at Belvidere and build a rank-and-file movement to fight back for our jobs and lives. To workers at Belvidere, I say: build a rank-and-file committee to take the fight against job cuts and concessions into your own hands!

In their press release, Stellantis said that they are preparing for the transition to electrification and blamed other factors like the COVID-19 pandemic and the microchip shortage for their latest attack on jobs at Belvidere. That's the official reason, but the real reason is they want to squeeze the maximum profits out of the workforce. The company made a record $8 billion in profits in the first half of 2022 alone, a 34 percent increase from last year, off the back of its workers.

One worker told my campaign team: "The Stellantis corporate lady came down. She said, 'I'm really sorry to tell you, but you're idled. Everyone's getting a WARN notice.' Everyone was somber, and people were shocked."

Lehman supporters speak with morning shift workers at Stellantis Belvidere Assembly Plant

The company expects to blackmail workers into accepting further concessions in the contract talks this year with the lie that they will keep jobs or assign a new product to the plant. But any corporate promises of job guarantees in return for concessions are broken as easily as they are made, as workers' painful experiences have repeatedly demonstrated.

The company hopes to extort further tax savings by pitting state and local governments against each other in a bidding war. According to UAW Region 4, UAW President Ray Curry is working with President Biden to "pressure" Stellantis with federal incentives to keep the plant open, instead of mobilizing an all-out strike across the auto industry against the attacks on jobs.

The billionaire Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker is also working behind the scenes to offer Stellantis tax incentives and to subsidize the company to keep the plant in Illinois. Pritzker is planning to make such overtures to Ford as well, supposedly to prevent the closure of Ford's Chicago Assembly Plant, which has also not been assigned new electric products so far.

There were close to 5,000 workers working three shifts at the Belvidere plant in 2019. Since the pandemic, the company has ruthlessly cut down the workforce and eliminated two shifts, destroying the lives of thousands of workers, with horrendous ripple effects for the regional economy in a struggling area like Rockford, Illinois. Workers have told me that Rockford was once a booming manufacturing town decades ago, but like many Midwestern industrial towns, the local economy has been ravaged by the corporations.

Former Belvidere workers who lost their jobs had to take up lower-paying jobs in their area or uproot their families and move hundreds of miles to another plant, with no guarantee that they would have continued employment.

The attack on jobs is not just limited to workers at Belvidere, but is part of the company's global strategy. Earlier this month, Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares threatened that the company will cut costs to "absorb the additional cost of electrification," adding, "If the market shrinks, we don't need so many plants." He stated ominously that "unpopular decisions will have to be made." Tavares is currently the highest-paid auto executive in the industry, making a record $20 million in salary, plus a stock package worth roughly $34 million.

Just this month, Stellantis announced that it would eliminate its third shift at its SUV factory in Sochaux, France, impacting over 750 jobs at the facility of 2,700 workers, of which 1,000 are temporary workers. The French unions at the plant claimed they were not surprised, but have done nothing to defend the workers.

Stellantis and the auto unions in Italy agreed to over 1,820 job cuts last year, effectively putting 30 percent of auto jobs at risk in Italy. Gianluca Ficco of the UILM union in Italy said such cuts were necessary to enable the company's transition to EVs in a "socially acceptable" way.

Late last year, the company also threatened thousands of jobs at Warren Truck Assembly in the Detroit area, slandering workers for supposed excess absenteeism and quality issues. Temps at Warren have had their hours cut to the bone, and they're transferring full-time workers to other plants, causing a lot of anxiety among workers worried they might also get "bumped."

In 2019, then-UAW President Rory Gamble bragged of the contract between the UAW and Fiat Chrysler: "F.C.A. has been a great American success story thanks to the hard work of our members. We have achieved substantial gains and job security provisions for the fastest growing auto company in the United States."

So much for the phony promises from the UAW bureaucracy! Who succeeded? Certainly not the workers. FCA and then Stellantis have seen tens of billions in profits over the past decade from the sweat and toil of autoworkers with the help of the UAW imposing concessions contracts, including ramming through another sellout agreement after workers rejected a contract offer in 2015, the first such contract rejection in decades. Recently, Ray Curry and the UAW tops sold out the strike of UAW workers at CNH, which is also owned by Stellantis' largest shareholder, the billionaire Agnelli family, isolating the striking workers in Wisconsin and Iowa for more than eight months and starving them on poverty-level strike pay.

In response to the job cuts, UAW Vice President Cindy Estrada again sought to pit Stellantis workers against their coworkers in other countries. Estrada said, "There are many vehicle platforms imported from other countries that could be built in Belvidere with skill and quality by UAW members at Belvidere."

This toxic nationalism, long peddled by the UAW bureaucracy, must be opposed, as it divides autoworkers from their class brothers and sisters in other countries, pitting workers in a race to the bottom. The auto companies, for their part, have a global strategy as they reorganize the entire industry

for electrification on the backs of workers. Industry analysts have projected that millions of jobs could be cut by the auto companies as the different companies seek to dominate the electric car market.

Ford and General Motors have also announced their own plans to impose cost cuts on workers, including a brutal set of layoffs that have begun at Ford, which announced layoffs of over 8,000 employees last summer. Ford is planning major attacks on jobs in Europe this year, including in Germany, with between 2,500 and 4,000 jobs threatened. The IG Metall union has done nothing to stop this. While GM made $10 billion in profits last year, it announced in January that it would begin cost cuts and reductions in its workforce via attrition.

The auto companies have made record profits. If they refuse to give us the right to a good-paying job with safe working conditions, they have forfeited their right to be privately run and should be put under the democratic control of workers to meet our needs, and not those of the billionaires.

Stellantis workers need a united international strategy to combat these transnational corporations. Every UAW worker should be out on strike over the prospect of Stellantis closing another plant. That is what solidarity means. The only way forward is to fight alongside our coworkers abroad, not against them in a race to the bottom.

A global strike wave of workers against the cost-of-living crisis and job cuts is emerging, with hundreds of thousands striking in the UK against anti-strike laws and millions striking and protesting in France against proposed pension cuts. Thousands of Caterpillar UAW workers in Illinois are also gearing up for a major contract battle, with nearly 99 percent voting to authorize a strike last month.

This is why I have been running in the UAW presidential elections: to build a rank-and-file movement with an international strategy to fight the attacks on jobs and win what workers need. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is leading this movement. In opposition to my campaign, the UAW bureaucracy suppressed voter turnout in the first round of the union elections, hoping to maintain the pro-corporate status quo and confine the race to well-paid bureaucrats like Ray Curry and Shawn Fain.

As I stated in my election campaign rally last year against job cuts and concessions: “It is high time for workers to fight back. This is what my campaign is about: organizing the rank and file to transfer power to the shop floor, abolishing the UAW apparatus that blocks us from fighting and launching a real campaign to defend our interests.”

To Stellantis workers: ***I stand with you and will fight with you***. I urge you to immediately build rank-and-file committees at Stellantis Belvidere, and link up with the newly formed rank-and-file committees at Chicago Ford Assembly Plant, GM Flint Assembly Plant, Caterpillar, Detroit-area Stellantis plants and with committees of other workers to mount a working-class counteroffensive with an international strategy.

To discuss forming a rank-and-file committee, contact my campaign today.

Sincerely,

William Lehman

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS’ POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved