

# UAW increases weekly strike pay to \$400 in desperate bid to placate workers' anger

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As anger builds among autoworkers over rampaging inflation and the string of miserable contract betrayals carried out by the United Auto Workers, the UAW International Executive Board has voted to raise weekly strike pay from its current paltry level of \$275 to \$400.

In a statement on the union's website issued June 7, UAW President Ray Curry declared, "UAW members who strike are fighting to hold their employers accountable. Our striking members and their families deserve our solidarity, and this increased benefit will help them hold the line."

The UAW strike fund stood at a colossal \$826 million as of March 2022, enough to support weekly \$1,000 checks for every striking CNH worker for more than a decade. The fund would be even larger if the UAW executives had not been able to divert a portion of the money to fund their incomes and privileges.

The strike pay announcement followed a statement by Curry on June 6 which unconvincingly sought to strike a militant posture in advance of the UAW Constitutional Convention next month. Curry claimed on behalf of the UAW's ruling faction that "we are committed to fighting any attempt to erode or degrade UAW wages and benefits."

The union's announcement of the token rise in strike pay evoked a torrent of angry comments from workers on Facebook, who correctly saw it as no more than an insincere ploy to win back their trust after decades of union collusion with management.

Several pointed to the UAW's efforts to prevent them from striking. "Doesn't mean anything if you won't let us strike," one commented. Another said, "Talk is cheap. Our last contract, our local UAW passed a strike vote, couldn't reach an agreement with the employer, and the UAW big shots told us WE'RE NOT ALLOWED TO STRIKE AND WOULDN'T BACK

US. I guess because we're not lining their pockets like the Big 3. The UAW is an absolute joke."

Other workers raised demands for the recovery of gains previously bargained away by the union, such as COLA (cost-of-living adjustment raises), pensions, retiree health care and equal pay for equal work. One stated:

How about EQUALITY for everyone?? Equal everything!

Do away with this divided tier system, people feel like second class citizens.

These companies are making record profits, paying their CEOs ridiculous earnings and yet the company cannot afford pensions or healthcare after retirement for Tier 2 folks.

Other workers saw the strike pay increase as posturing by the bureaucrats ahead of the upcoming direct election of top UAW officers. "Just trying to do damage control for the upcoming elections," one popular comment read.

The change to direct elections was mandated in a membership referendum last year. Curry himself only recently announced that he would run to retain his post as UAW president.

Significantly, in his June 6 statement Curry said nothing about reversing past concessions, such as eliminating the tier system and restoring pensions. Nor did he say a word about fighting for significant pay improvements and cost-of-living protection in the face of surging inflation.

The complete indifference, in fact, hostility of the UAW leadership to the well-being of workers was

shown again this week by the refusal by Curry and the UAW's national headquarters to even acknowledge the horrific death of Steven Dierkes, who fell into a crucible with molten metal at the Caterpillar Mapleton foundry in Illinois on June 2. For decades, the UAW has worked with the companies to oversee increasingly dangerous working conditions, turning many workplaces into death traps.

As the 2023 contract expirations for Caterpillar and the Big Three automakers approach, workers' anger over the erosion of incomes and unbearable working conditions is reaching a fever pitch. This past week alone has seen gasoline prices rise to over \$5 or even \$6 a gallon in many parts of the United States.

One Warren Truck worker speaking to a *World Socialist Web Site* campaign team outside the plant Thursday expressed outrage at the exploitation of younger workers at Stellantis, adding, "I am being hammered by rising food and fuel prices."

An older worker said, "In the last 20 years my wages have gone up a total of just \$3.76. I am telling younger workers they have to fight."

Since the beginning of 2021, the UAW has faced a series of escalating rebellions by rank-and-file autoworkers. At Volvo Trucks, Dana Corporation, John Deere and Detroit Diesel, workers massively voted down sellout contracts pushed by the UAW with wage increases below inflation. Volvo and Deere workers conducted militant strikes that were knifed in the back by the union.

At farm and heavy equipment company CNH, some 1,200 UAW members have been on strike for over one month to demand major pay increases, the restoration of COLA and significant improvements to working conditions.

In a statement Tuesday, the CNH Workers Rank-and-File Committee demanded strike pay be raised to workers' full income, writing, "First, \$400 remains totally inadequate to meet our needs. It comes out to roughly a \$10 hourly wage, half or less what many CNH workers normally make.

"Second, the strike fund is not a 'benefit' to be granted or taken away from on high. *We workers built up that fund with our dues, and it rightfully belongs to us.*"

Workers can give no more credibility to the latest maneuvers of the UAW than those in the past. It should

be recalled that both former UAW presidents Dennis Williams and Gary Jones—who are serving prison sentences for embezzling workers' dues—postured as "reformers" who would supposedly lead a struggle in the 2015 and 2019 contract negotiations.

The greatest fear of Curry and his fellow UAW bureaucrats is that the growing militancy of workers will find expression in a movement outside of their control. The *World Socialist Web Site* is encouraging such a development through the formation of independent rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace. These committees will fight for what workers actually want and need by establishing links throughout the auto industry and with other sections of workers and build a powerful mass movement capable of winning their demands.



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