

UAW President Shawn Fain on Clarios strike: Empty phrases and outright lies

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In his first public comments on the more than two-week strike by Clarios workers in Ohio, United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain combined empty promises of support for the striking workers with outright lies aimed at concealing the real role of the UAW bureaucracy in this critical battle for all autoworkers.

Fain's comments came two days after Clarios workers voted by 76 percent to reject a second pro-company contract, which UAW International and UAW Local 12 officials tried to foist on them in a snap vote Monday morning. Like the first deal, which workers rejected by 98 percent on April 27, the contract included a cut in real wages and sanctioned 12-hour shifts with no overtime payment after eight hours.

A few minutes into his half-hour Facebook live event Wednesday afternoon, Fain said, "I want to take a moment to acknowledge the 500 members of UAW Local 12 who are out on strike in Holland, Ohio, in order to win higher pay and stronger scheduling protections, as well as the 160 members of Local 174 who are out on an unfair labor practice strike against Constellium Automotive."

These struggles, Fain said, were reminders that the "way workers build power and make gains in bargaining is by having the collective capacity to shut employers down when our employers refuse to treat our members fairly." He made this statement without acknowledging that the UAW officials did everything to prevent the strike in the first place. Ignoring a near unanimous strike vote, the union extended the contract. Then, even after workers voted down the first deal, the UAW kept workers on the job another 11 days, helping the company stockpile batteries before a rank-and-file revolt forced them to call the strike on May 8.

"I want striking UAW members to know that our 1

million strong stands in solidarity with you in the fight for justice," Fain declared. He added, "Your strike is an inspiration, and we are proud to support you."

In fact, the rebellion by the Clarios workers has sent shockwaves throughout the UAW bureaucracy because it threatens to spark a broader movement of autoworkers against the demands by the Big Three automakers for massive job and wage cuts to pay for their transition to electric vehicle production.

Fain has not made an appearance on the picket lines at the Toledo area plant, even though his office at the UAW's misnamed Solidarity House in Detroit is only an hour's drive away. Moreover, the UAW apparatus has done as little as possible to inform, let alone mobilize the 1.1 million members of the union to back the strike. In the meantime, the company has cut off medical insurance, obtained a strikebreaking court injunction limiting pickets to five at a gate and has brought in scabs to keep the factory running and shipping batteries to the Big Three automakers.

Although Fain acknowledged that Clarios "supplies some of our Big Three plants," he did not raise a ban on the handling of the scab batteries. On the contrary, the UAW bureaucracy is allowing GM, Ford and Stellantis to continue producing vehicles with batteries from the strikebound factory and other Clarios plants, undermining the strike whose outcome will have immense consequences for all autoworkers.

Real support means a full ban by UAW members on any handling of the scab batteries that go into Ford F-150s, Ram trucks, Chevy Silverados and other models. This would immensely strengthen the striking workers and deliver a crushing blow to the billionaire owners of Clarios and the Big Three auto executives who are backing their strikebreaking effort.

Fain read a comment from a Clarios worker,

declaring, “We will not agree to a contract until we get our money back,” referring to the repeated pay cuts workers have suffered due to the previous UAW contract that essentially froze their wages, plus new pay cuts over the last two years that union officials did nothing to oppose.

Fain replied, “Amen,” adding his stock phrase, “And we are behind you 100%.” He continued, “These workers aren’t asking for the moon. They’re asking for a decent wage, and the company is trying to impose a crappy work schedule on them. So, these workers are holding their ground, and we’re behind them 100%. I know that Director [David] Green, from Region 2B, is behind them 100%, and I know Vice President Boyer from the IPS Group and George Hardy have been working hard to support them every step of the way, so we’re there with you.”

This is a flat-out lie. Region 2B Director Green has been the chief author of the two sellout agreements that rank-and-file workers tossed into the garbage. At Monday’s meeting, he and Local 12 officials were telling workers this was the best deal they were going to get and maybe they could get a better wage package in the next contract three years from now.

Although the agreement had been announced three days earlier, the UAW tried to rush through a vote on the same day they released “highlights” of the deal and increased the signing bonus in hopes that workers would buy it.

As one worker told the WSWS, the UAW officials “must think we’re stupid by trying to get us to accept the same contract we voted down before.” After the vote, Clarios management expressed its “disappointment” that workers did not ratify the deal “despite the endorsement of the UAW bargaining committee.”

The Clarios strike has proven that the replacement of former UAW President Ray Curry and his Administrative Caucus with Fain and his pseudo-left supported Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) slate has done nothing to change the character of the corporatist UAW apparatus. This is a warning to GM, Ford and Stellantis workers in the US and Canada whose contracts expire in mid-September.

The rhetoric may have changed due to the *Labor Notes* writers and members of the Democratic Socialists of America who are staffing Fain’s

administration, but the pro-capitalist, nationalist and Democratic Party-aligned program of the UAW bureaucracy remains.

Fain’s contempt for the democratic rights of rank-and-file workers was underscored by his praise Wednesday for the UAW’s rigged election process. “I am proud we had a democratic election and the membership had a say in this,” Fain said of an election run by the bureaucracy, which disenfranchised 90 percent of the membership and installed him in power with about 3 percent of the vote of the rank and file.

As the statement of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) explained, the Clarios strike is the first stage in a broader fight, and the outcome of the struggle at Clarios will determine the future course of events. This is especially true for the 150,000 Big Three autoworkers in the US and 23,000 in Canada who face a fight against the ruling elite and governments in both countries that want to force workers to bear the full costs of the transition to electric vehicle production.”

Workers cannot allow the UAW bureaucracy to isolate the Clarios workers and starve them into submission. Instead, rank-and-file workers must take real solidarity action. As the IWA-RFC statement says, “The IWA-RFC urges workers to establish Clarios Strike Support Committees to spread information about the strike, inform workers of what is at stake and ensure that no worker handles scab batteries. This must be discussed by workers at every plant and on every shop floor in connection with preparing rank-and-file organizations throughout the auto industry, well in advance of the Big Three contract expirations.”

For more information on building rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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