

UAW president releases bogus “demands” while promoting Democratic Party

Jerry White
3 August 2023

To discuss joining the autoworkers rank-and-file committee network, fill out the form at the end of this article. Sign up for text message updates on the Big Three contract fight by texting AUTO to (866) 847-1086.

In a Facebook live event Tuesday evening, United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain outlined what he said the UAW was demanding in its contract talks with General Motors, Ford and Stellantis. Rushing through his “contract update” and replies to a few handpicked questions in a half hour, Fain did not provide any concrete information about the UAW’s actual demands or the content of its closed-door talks with corporate management.

Coming a week after the Big Three automakers announced massive profits of over \$22 billion in the first half of the year, Fain held up a sign with the slogan, “Record Profits. Record Contracts.” “Our members were robbed of wages,” Fain declared, sitting in front of signs that contrasted corporate profits with everything autoworkers have lost since 2007.

Fain did not mention the UAW bureaucracy’s and his own responsibility for this robbery. As a member of the UAW-Chrysler negotiating committee in 2009, he voted to accept all the givebacks demanded by the Obama-Biden administration during the restructuring of GM and Chrysler. The historic attacks included cutting the wages of all new hires in half, the elimination of pensions for second-tier workers and longer waiting periods for them to reach top wages, the loss of Cost-of-Living Allowances (COLA) and the closure of plants and destruction of thousands of jobs.

“We’re back in the fight,” Fain declared, expecting workers to believe the UAW bureaucracy had suddenly carried out a 180-degree turn after decades of colluding with corporate management. And all of this has been achieved simply because Fain and his slate was installed in a rigged UAW election, with a turnout of just 9 percent in the first round.

Referring to the endless “backroom deals,” UAW presidents have signed behind the backs of the members, Fain declared, “those days are gone.” He followed this up by announcing a completely empty gesture. The booklet of demands, formerly called the “president’s demands,” would now be called “the members’ demands.” But this rebranding ploy—put together the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America members in his

PR department—will have no practical effect at all.

He then claimed that UAW leadership has put forward the “most audacious and ambitious list of demands in decades.”

But the reality of what the UAW plans was quickly revealed by the following lie: “The Teamsters just ended tiers at UPS. We are going to end tiers at the Big Three.”

Fain’s praise for the Teamsters’ sellout deal at UPS demonstrates that the UAW bureaucracy is planning to similarly attempt to force concessions on autoworkers. The Teamsters reached a deal with UPS, which they have falsely hailed as “historic,” in order to prevent an August 1 strike by 340,000 UPS workers.

Under the terms of the Teamsters-UPS contract, the proposed increase of starting pay for part-timers to \$21 per hour would do next to nothing to lift the company’s nearly 200,000 part-time workers out of poverty. Most get no more than three hours of work a night and are forced to work two or three jobs to make ends meet. Far from eliminating tiers, the deal creates a second tier of lower paid part-timers out of all new hires. They will start out at \$21 per hour, but this will not change until the last year of the contract.

The UAW’s “demands” presented by Fain were carefully crafted vague generalities. “In the coming weeks, we’re trying to boil our demands down to numbers,” Fain claimed.

Insofar as his “demands” consisted of double-talk and evasions, a certain amount of translation is needed:

- “We’re going to get double-digit pay raises”: For a four-year contract, this could be wage increases that are below the rate of inflation, or a combination of somewhat higher raises, front-loaded in the first year, followed by minuscule below-inflation raises and phony bonuses for the rest of the contract. Fain deliberately avoided committing to any specific wage target.

- “We want COLA”: This could mean anything. The COLA increases John Deere workers received in the 2021 contract—which was signed by Chuck Browning, now in charge of Ford negotiations—were well below the rate of inflation, then 6.2 percent. “We’re getting a paltry 1.18 percent for COLA, which honestly is a slap in the face,” one Deere worker told the WSWS at the time.

- A “significant increase” in pensions for current retirees,

which can mean anything for retirees who have not had an increase since 2007.

- The return of defined benefit pensions and retiree healthcare benefits for second-tier workers, which the employers have dismissed out of hand, especially since both the UAW and the corporations accepted the two-tier system in the first place to drastically cut labor costs.

- “Make temporary workers permanent and end the abuse of temps.” In fact, the resolutions adopted at the UAW special bargaining convention last year, and backed by Fain’s Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) faction state, “We recognize that some jobs are temporary by their nature...” It continued, “Our contracts should limit the use of temporary workers” and give them a “path to permanent employment...”

- “Right to strike over plant closures, and if the companies flee, they have to pay workers to do community service work or other things.” This formula, which explicitly accepts plant closures and mass layoffs, is part of the scheme the UAW bureaucracy is pitching to get corporate and government funding for UAW-run “training programs” for tens of thousands of workers the companies want to throw out of their jobs in the transition to electric vehicles.

Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy know the companies have no intention of granting any substantial concessions to workers.

In a threatening letter to Stellantis workers, the company warned that the outcome of the contract negotiations would “impact your future and that of your family and community.” The letter made clear that management was expecting the UAW apparatus to help the company cut costs and give it more “flexibility in how we run our operations” so EV prices could be reduced and the cars still sold at large profits.

The militant-sounding rhetoric by Fain & Co. is aimed at disarming workers and creating the illusion that the bureaucracy is leading a fight against the companies. In reality, the UAW apparatus is once again engaging in a conspiracy with the companies and the state over how to suppress workers’ resistance to massive job cuts and concessions.

In his remarks, Fain did everything to promote the lie that the Democrats could be counted on to defend autoworkers’ interests. He quoted former UAW President Walter Reuther’s remarks to the Democratic Party in 1952 and said politicians had to “choose which side they are on.” He praised “30 senators,” including Ohio’s Sherrod Brown and Illinois’s Dick Durbin, for signing a letter to the automakers urging them to include EV battery workers in the master UAW contract.

But the Democratic politicians, no less than the Republicans, know exactly whose side they’re on, and so does Fain. It’s the side of corporate America, i.e., the capitalist ruling class. Both Brown and Durbin voted in the Senate to ban last year’s railroad strike and impose a pro-company contract on 110,000 railroaders which they previously rejected.

Last month, Fain also held a private White House meeting

with President Biden, who is determined to prevent any strike that threatens corporate interests, the prosecution of the proxy war against Russia and plans for a bigger military confrontation with China.

Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy know they are sitting on a social powder keg and that workers are determined to win substantial improvements in wages and working conditions and restore years of UAW-backed concessions. They are trying to head off the growing movement by workers to take matters into their own hands.

But many workers are seeing through this and are instead growing the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network. Affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), the network is calling for “the formation of rank-and-file committees at every factory, warehouse and workplace” in order to prepare for a strike of autoworkers across North America.

“To make a long story short, Fain’s talk is nothing but BS,” a member of the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee at the suburban Detroit Stellantis plant told the WWSWS. “He’s selling dreams & believe it or not, some people are buying. He’s telling folks what they want to hear to throw them completely off guard come contract time. But we can’t fall for it. We have to organize rank-and-file committees to take the conduct of this fight in our own hands, and fight for the demands that we need, not what the company and the UAW say they can afford.”

A worker who was on strike with more than 500 Clarios workers in Toledo, Ohio, before their struggle was sold out by Fain and the UAW bureaucracy, added, “Fain and the UAW are not going to fight for any of those things. We were out for 40 days, and they kept us on this \$500 a week BS in strike pay, until they wore us down. They pushed through a contract that we voted down two times before. The company has taken away our shift breaks and is adding a 12-hour shift with no overtime.

“Everything Fain and the UAW is saying is a lie. They are telling workers what they want to hear, so we will count on them instead of organizing to fight these billion-dollar companies. If autoworkers don’t build their own rank-and-file committees, they are going to lose. What they did to us is shameful. But the working class can fight, we have the power, we just have to organize and use it.”



To contact the WWSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact