

UAW president grovels before Biden, as opposition builds among autoworkers

Marcus Day
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An assertive and resolute mood is building among 150,000 workers at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis plants in the US, with less than 30 days till the United Auto Workers contracts expire on September 14. The contracts for another 18,000 Canadian autoworkers expire September 18. Strike authorization votes for workers in the US are beginning this weekend and will continue through August 24, and they are certain to produce a result overwhelmingly in favor.

Workers throughout the auto industry are determined to finally halt the decades-long series of concessionary contracts enforced by the union bureaucracies and win unequivocal improvements. Workers are demanding wage increases large enough to make up for years of eroding pay, cost-of-living raises to protect against inflation, the conversion of temps to full-time status, pensions, retiree health benefits, the restoration of the eight-hour day with no loss in income and more.

With anger heating up in the auto plants, UAW President Shawn Fain issued what can only be described as a groveling response Tuesday to the intervention of President Joe Biden in the contract talks.

Fain's reply deliberately covered up the purpose of Biden's intervention in the auto contracts, which is to ensure that the profit interests of the corporations are protected and that the class struggle is contained and does not disrupt the US proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Instead, Fain praised Biden and uttered not a word of criticism of the president's policies.

"At this critical moment in negotiations, we appreciate President Biden's support for strong contracts that ensure good paying union jobs now and pave the way for a just transition to an EV future," Fain wrote. "With the president's support, we know those profits can be invested in collective bargaining agreements that lift up autoworkers, our families and our communities."

On Monday, Biden had issued a statement calling on the auto companies and the UAW apparatus to work together to reach a so-called "fair agreement." While couched in typical double-speak and evasions, Biden's statement—not to mention his

entire political career as a shill for corporate America—leaves no doubt that he is backing the companies' demands. Biden called for a deal which would enable the corporations to "successfully compete domestically and globally," which can only be enacted through sweeping concessions and job cuts.

While backing the companies' profit interests, Biden also reiterated his support for allowing the UAW apparatus to "organize" the new electric vehicle and EV battery plants. The president did so not because he views the UAW as a champion of workers, but rather because he knows that the union bureaucracy has served as reliable tool of management for the past 45 years.

In his reply, Fain singled out Biden's support for the UAW's entry into the EV battery plants, presented under the smokescreen of ensuring they have "the same strong pay and safety standards" at the Detroit Three plants. The justification is absurd, given that the UAW apparatus oversees sweatshop and frequently dangerous conditions throughout the assembly and auto parts plants. In fact, the UAW bureaucracy's main objective is to increase its dues revenue, even if the workers it "organizes" make poverty wages.

"He cannot be trusted"

In contrast to Fain, autoworkers have responded with ridicule and contempt for Biden's so-called "support."

In the most-liked comment on the UAW's Facebook post of Fain's statement, a worker wrote, "He issued a similar statement in regards to the railroad unions. He cannot be trusted." He later elaborated, "This isn't about him vs. a Republican. This is about his actions vs. his 'statements.'"

Biden has already become notorious among substantial sections of workers for working with both parties in Congress to ban a railroad worker strike last year and impose a contract workers had been voting against.

"DC is just a hub of Wall Street," a Ford Chicago Assembly worker told the WSWs about Biden's statement. "The only thing that's going to change things is action, not politicians."

Fain's rush to embrace Biden's "support" exposes the UAW president's claims to be fighting for workers' demands as nothing but a fraud. In reality, Fain and his administration—all drawn from long-time members of the corrupt union bureaucracy—are continuing the pro-corporate policies of their predecessors, attempting to cover them up with phony "militant," "left-wing" rhetoric.

The UAW's promotion of Biden, a seasoned enemy of the working class, underscores the necessity for workers to organize now to ensure they are prepared to overcome the betrayal being prepared by Fain & Co. Rank-and-file committees controlled by workers should be established at every factory and workplace and link up with the network of committees affiliated with International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

A group of autoworkers' rank-and-file committees has issued a series of demands based on what workers need and is putting forward a strategy for workers to fight for them, including raising strike pay, establishing workers' oversight over all contract talks and preparing for an all-out strike throughout the auto industry.

Talks between UAW and White House are "ongoing"

While Fain's administration has sought to present itself as "tough" on Biden, withholding an early endorsement of his reelection campaign, the truth is that the UAW president is closely coordinating with the White House in closed-door talks, conspiring behind the backs of workers.

On Thursday, the *Detroit News* reported that communication between the White House and the UAW apparatus has "gotten stronger." The *News* quoted Gene Sperling—a top Biden economic advisor and his point person in the Detroit Three contacts—who said that talks between the UAW leadership and the White House are "ongoing and timely."

Sperling served on the Auto Task Force under the Obama-Biden administration, which in 2009 worked with the UAW bureaucracy to impose historic job cuts, plant closings and concessions onto autoworkers.

Seeking to hold back a movement of the working class, Biden has relied on the union bureaucracies to block or isolate strikes and impose below-inflation wage increases. In the case of the UAW and Fain's administration, Biden's Department of Labor has repeatedly intervened to shore up their stability. It is seeking to quash an official complaint against rampant disenfranchisement in the UAW's elections brought by rank-and-file worker Will Lehman.

However, there are indications of growing nervousness in the ruling class over the ability of the union to control the class struggle.

New York Times article Wednesday referred to the "long-simmering rage" among workers who "have spent years enduring out-of-touch leaders, meager wage growth and concession-filled labor agreements, which forced some to do similar jobs as co-workers for less pay."

However, the *Times* sought to portray the elevation of newly left-talking longtime union bureaucrats such as Fain and Teamsters President Sean O'Brien as the expression of workers' anger, rather than what it is: a defensive response of the ruling class and the union bureaucracies, which recognized that the "old guard" overseeing the unions were rapidly losing their credibility and effectiveness.

The *Times* anxiously noted that Fain's and O'Brien's rhetorical appeals to "members' anger is not without risk: It can raise expectations and make it difficult for leaders to finalize contracts."

However, in a rare acknowledgement of the toothless character of these officials "strident rhetoric," the *Times* cited David Pryzbylski, a corporate attorney, who said, "A lot of times that stuff stops: They go out and say what they wanted to say, they send up a signal flare and move on." Pryzbylski suggested that management ignore union officials' bluster, according to the *Times*. "If you start responding, it stays in the news cycle." In other words, a rhetorical tug of war in public between management and the union bureaucracies raises the risk of contributing to the growth of opposition in the working class, and the "bluster" of union officials is better to be treated as just that.

Autoworkers can place no faith in Fain's administration and the UAW bureaucracy to fight for anything. To secure their needs and defeat the attacks of the corporations and the Biden administration requires that workers take the initiative, establish rank-and-file structures under their control and build support now for an all-out fight throughout the auto industry.



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