

The battle lines in the autoworkers fight: Class struggle vs. the UAW's promotion of the Democratic Party

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The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter and the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network are co-hosting a meeting this Sunday at 3 p.m. Eastern on how autoworkers can win their demands in the 2023 contract struggle. Register here to attend.

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With little more than three weeks before the expiration of the Big Three contracts on September 14, autoworkers must take stock of the situation and consciously prepare for the battle ahead.

The vote by Lear auto parts workers in Hammond, Indiana to reject a second United Auto Workers-backed contract by 75 percent on Sunday makes it clear that workers will not accept more concessions and are determined to win back decades of UAW givebacks to the corporations.

At the same time, the auto companies have dug in their heels, rejecting out of hand demands to reverse the crushing concessions that have impoverished workers and guaranteed a quarter of a trillion dollars in profits in the last decade alone. According to media reports, Ford is making plans to use white-collar employees to keep parts warehouses running in the event of a strike.

UAW President Shawn Fain has publicized a series of popular contract proposals to keep control of an increasingly restive and determined workforce. But Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy fully intend to betray the fight of workers for massive wage increases, the restoration of cost-of-living allowances (COLA), the abolition of tiers, company-paid pensions for all and an end to the abuse of temporary workers. The gap between what Fain says and what the UAW bureaucracy does can be seen in its betrayal of the 40-day strike by Clarios battery workers in Ohio—which resulted in below-inflation raises and a 12-hour day with no overtime—and efforts to ram through a similar sellout at Lear in Indiana.

Far more significant than his empty words are the actions of Fain and the UAW apparatus. The UAW leadership is in continuous, intense discussion with the Biden administration and Democrats on how to contain autoworkers' resistance and impose the dictates of the corporations.

With Fain & Co. conspiring with Biden and the Democrats, workers must organize now to prevent the defeat of their struggle, which would entail historic concessions and job cuts, impacting not just the auto industry, but broad sections of the working class.

As history has shown again and again, workers will achieve victory only through the mobilization of their independent strength. Rank-and-file committees must be organized at every factory, warehouse and workplace so that workers can actually communicate with each other. Such committees will provide a means for workers to forge connections across plants and companies. They will also provide the necessary organizational structures for workers to overcome the betrayal being prepared by the UAW bureaucracy.

The pro-corporate conspiracy between the UAW apparatus and the Democratic Party was made perfectly clear by the presence of US Representative Haley Stevens at the “Solidarity Sunday” rally at UAW Region 1 headquarters in Warren, Michigan on August 20. In 2009, Stevens was a member of President Obama’s White House Auto Task Force, which demanded that UAW members give up massive concessions, including cutting wages in half for new hires, the elimination of COLA and a vast expansion of temporary workers, in exchange for a government bailout of GM and Chrysler.

As a reward for the UAW’s collaboration—including from Fain, who voted on the UAW-Chrysler national bargaining team to accept the massive concessions—the Obama-Biden White House handed the UAW apparatus billions of dollars in GM and Chrysler shares, along with the control of the company-funded VEBA retiree healthcare trust fund.

In her remarks at the UAW rally, Stevens praised union officials for making “the concessions then.” She assured Fain & Co. that Biden was preparing another payoff to the UAW apparatus for their cooperation in the transition to electric vehicles, which will entail a new round of massive attacks on jobs and living standards. “Now, we have another great transition. But the deal is, my friends, we are not transitioning anything without the UAW, and without your fair share.”

Stevens and the other Democrats paraded at the UAW rally,

like US Senator Debbie Stabenow, may be the closest allies of Fain & Co, but they are the ruthless enemies of the working class. Last November, they joined hundreds of Congressional Democrats and Republicans in banning the strike by 110,000 railroad workers and imposing a pro-company contract brokered by Biden, which the workers had previously rejected.

Fain has been in virtually daily discussions with the strikebreaking Biden administration about how to keep control of increasingly rebellious autoworkers. The White House has expended a great deal of energy giving the UAW bureaucracy—up to its neck in corruption, taking bribes from corporations and embezzlement of union dues—a facelift. This includes the Department of Labor’s sanctioning of the bogus UAW election, which effectively excluded 90 percent of the UAW membership and put Fain in power with only 3 percent of the votes of the rank and file.

With the ongoing strike by writers and actors, mass opposition to sellout contracts at UPS and on the docks, and growing militancy of healthcare and education workers, Biden is relying on the UAW bureaucracy to strangle the autoworkers and prevent any further disruption to the profits of Corporate America and the administration’s plans to make the working class pay for its preparations to expand the war against Russia and launch World War III against China.

An understanding of this gang-up is essential for autoworkers to prepare their own response. It is not enough to be opposed to more concessions. This opposition must be organized. Workers cannot “wait and see” and be taken unawares when Fain and the UAW bureaucracy bring back their inevitable sellout contract. They must be organized to counterpose the will of the workers to the illegitimate decisions of the UAW bureaucracy.

Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president Will Lehman won nearly 5,000 votes in the first round of the UAW election based on his program of abolishing the UAW bureaucracy and transferring power and decision-making to the workers on the shop floor. The support for Lehman’s campaign shows there is a powerful base for the expansion of the network of rank-and-file committees, controlled by workers themselves, not union bureaucrats, to unite full-time and part-time, first- and second-tier, auto and auto parts workers.

As one part-time autoworker at the Stellantis Jeep plant in Toledo, Ohio said, “We have to hit the auto companies with all 18 wheels.”

To prepare such a struggle, rank-and-file committees should demand and fight for the following measures:

- **Strike pay must be raised to \$750 a week so the strike fund**, paid for by workers’ dues, can be used to show the corporations that workers are prepared for a sustained struggle.

- **All negotiations must be overseen by the rank-and-file workers, with detailed reports given to the full membership every day.** No confidence can be given to Fain’s vague “updates” that conceal what is being discussed behind

workers’ backs.

- **Preparations must be made for an all-out strike to shut down the auto and auto parts industry.** Workers must reject any efforts to limit workers to “Hollywood” strikes at a few component factories, which would only be the prelude to another sellout. By expanding the Autoworker Rank-and-File Network, striking workers will be able to unify with entertainment, UPS and dockworkers, and other sections of the working class to wage a joint fight.

- **The struggle must be expanded throughout North America and beyond.** It is impossible for workers to effectively fight giant transnational corporations if their struggle is limited to the US.

For the first time in decades, the Big Three contracts for Canadian workers is expiring just days after the ones in the US. At the same time, workers in Mexico, from GM workers at Silao to Lear and other auto parts workers in Matamoros and Ciudad Juárez have repeatedly sought to unite with their US brothers and sisters to fight poverty wages and the deadly spread of COVID-19 in the factories. Throughout the world, from VW workers in Germany to 150,000 Turkish metal workers whose contracts expire in September, autoworkers are all facing the same fight against the destruction of jobs and wages, and the collusion of the union bureaucracies and capitalist governments.

In opposition to the anti-Chinese and anti-Mexican filth spouted by the UAW bureaucracy to provide a cover for its collaboration with the auto companies and the war policies of the Biden administration, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is coordinating the struggle of workers across all borders. This will lay the groundwork for a powerful industrial and political counteroffensive by the international working class to end social inequality, war and the capitalist profit system, and reorganize economic life to meet the needs of the world’s producers, the working people of every country.



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