

As autoworkers cast massive strike vote, UAW bureaucracy begins running from demands

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*The Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network and the World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter are hosting an online meeting Sunday at 3 p.m. Eastern/2 p.m. Central. The meeting will review the latest developments in the Detroit Three-United Auto Workers contract talks and outline the strategy for rank-and-file workers to fight for their demands. **Register for the event here.***

Tens of thousands of GM, Ford and Stellantis workers have voted to strike the Big Three automakers when their contract expire three weeks from today on September 14 at 11:59 p.m. Angered over years of declining living standards, exhausting work schedules and record high corporate profits, workers in local after local cast near-unanimous votes to strike.

The massive strike vote is a sign of growing militancy of the working class throughout the United States and internationally, which is coming into direct conflict with the trade union bureaucracies, including the United Auto Workers (UAW) apparatus, and capitalist governments like the Biden administration.

Autoworkers are determined to fight for substantial wage improvements to protect them against the ravages of inflation and to overturn years of UAW-backed concessions. This includes during the 2009 bankruptcy restructuring of GM and Chrysler (now Stellantis) when the UAW collaborated with the Obama-Biden administration to halve the wages and eliminate pensions for new hires, abolish cost-of-living raises and income protection for laid-off workers, and vastly expand the number of highly exploited temporary part-time employees (TPTs), also known as supplemental employees. While the corporations have made a quarter of a trillion in the last decade alone, many autoworkers are forced to work two jobs and cannot afford to buy the vehicles they build.

“There are so many issues we have to fight for,” a Stellantis worker at the Toledo Jeep Complex in Ohio told the WSW. “The cost of living and inflation, having time with our families. TPTs are being hired in at \$15.78 an hour and working years before being rolled over. I’ve topped out at \$31 an hour but everything has more than doubled in price since I started. We’ve made no progress. A lot of young workers can’t afford to repair their cars.

There is a lot of carpooling at this plant.”

The UAW is scheduled to release the results of the strike vote today. A partial list of union locals and plants that have previously reported their results include:

- UAW Local 12, Stellantis Toledo Jeep Complex: 98 percent
- UAW Local 14, GM Toledo Propulsion Systems: 94 percent
- UAW Local 22, GM Factory Zero: 98 percent
- UAW Local 31, GM Fairfax, Missouri: 99 percent
- UAW Local 228, Ford Sterling Axle: 95 percent
 - UAW Local 276, GM Arlington, Texas, Assembly: 96.8 percent
- UAW Local 551, Ford Chicago Assembly: 97.5 percent
- UAW Local 588, Ford Chicago Stamping: 98 percent
- UAW Local 598, GM Flint Assembly Plant: 96 percent
 - UAW Local 602, GM Grand River/Delta Township (Lansing area): 98 percent
- UAW Local 600, Ford Dearborn Truck Plant: 98 percent
 - UAW Local 862, Ford Kentucky Truck/Louisville Assembly: 99 percent
- UAW Local 900, Ford Michigan Assembly: 99 percent
 - UAW Local 1264, Stellantis Sterling Stamping Plant: 95.2 percent
- UAW Local 3000, Ford Flat Rock Assembly: 95.42 percent

Dating back to 2015—when Fiat Chrysler workers rejected a UAW-backed national contract by two to one—there has been a growing rebellion against the UAW bureaucracy, whose top officials were taking corporate bribes to sign sellout contracts and embezzling dues money from workers. In the last few years alone, workers have repeatedly voted down sellout contracts, including at Volvo Trucks, Deere, Dana, Clarios and most recently twice at the Lear auto parts plant in Hammond, Indiana.

In a desperate effort to contain this upheaval, UAW President Shawn Fain—who was installed following an election marred by widespread voter disenfranchisement—has advanced a series of popular proposals, including a 40 percent pay increase, the abolition of tiers, and a shorter workweek with no loss in pay. But Fain and the UAW apparatus have no intention, let alone strategy, to fight for these things. The reality behind Fain’s rhetoric has been on display in his administration’s sellout of the 40-day Clarios strike in Toledo earlier this year and in the efforts by the UAW to beat back the resistance of Lear workers who have voted

down two UAW-backed contracts.

Most significantly, Fain has been in regular contact with Biden and White House officials, who plan to use the UAW bureaucracy, as they did in 2009, to impose massive cuts in jobs and wages to finance the automakers' transition to electric vehicles and escalate the administration's economic and military confrontation with China. In exchange, the UAW bureaucracy wants Biden's support to ensure that the UAW gets to collect dues from the workers in the new electric vehicle battery plants. The UAW also wants to get its hands on whatever government money will be made available to "retrain" the tens of thousands of workers displaced by the transition to EV production.

Fain is already retreating from his "demand" that workers in the electric battery plants be included under the UAW master contracts. According to the *Detroit News*, during a solidarity rally last Sunday in Warren, Michigan, Fain "said union teams are still negotiating for workers at the Ultium plant [in Lordstown, Ohio], but when asked if the union is still pushing to have Ultium workers covered by the national agreement, he said Ultium is 'a separate company as it is.'"

According to Bloomberg, the UAW and Ultium are close to a deal to raise starting pay for the workers from \$15.50 an hour to "more than \$20" while the union and the GM-LG Energy joint venture negotiate the first contract. This is only an indication that the UAW will maintain poverty wages and enforce management's dictates at the plant if it is granted the opportunity to "organize" these workers.

Autoworkers must organize now to oppose the inevitable betrayal by the UAW bureaucracy, which is following the same playbook as the Teamsters bureaucracy, which just pushed through a contract guaranteeing five years of poverty wages for part-timers who make up two-thirds of the company's workforce. A real fight requires expanding the network of autoworkers rank-and-file committees into every factory, warehouse and workplace to transfer power and decision making from Fain and the apparatus to workers on the shop floor.

Autoworkers have enormous power. According to Anderson Economic Group, a Michigan-based consulting firm, a work stoppage by nearly 150,000 UAW workers at the Detroit Three would cost the companies nearly \$1 billion after 10 days. This includes \$380 million for GM, \$325 million for Ford and \$285 million impact on Stellantis.

While Fain has "refused to discuss strike strategy," the media reports that he may call a limited strike—at a few component plants—which would undermine the power of the strike and at the same time limit the impact on the union's \$825 million strike fund because workers laid off due to the shortage of parts would collect unemployment benefits instead of strike pay.

But workers do not want a "Hollywood strike" or a struggle that is sold out like the 2019 GM strike or the Clarios strike. To prevent a sellout, new centers of working class power are needed in the factories, to exchange information, coordinate action and counteract the sabotage of the bureaucracy.

A Jeep worker with 10 years told the WSWS, "Fain and the UAW are saying a lot of things to make themselves look good. But they're the ones who got us in this predicament. He's saying what

people want to hear but it's all smoke and mirrors. We need to prepare for for another bad contract. We can't fall for the signing bonuses. If this does not benefit everyone, we should vote it it down."

Regarding Fain's proposals, another Jeep worker said, "Everything that is listed is what we gave up in 2009. It's what we conceded, and we want that back. They went through their bankruptcy and started making their profits again, and it's time to give it back. I'm hoping that everybody goes today and votes to strike, to let them know and send a message that the numbers are here. So, they know that we will strike if we have to.

"I'm hoping that Fain will come through with what he is saying," the worker said. When it was pointed out that the union bureaucracy has long claimed to fight for workers before selling them out he added, "we end of getting the same exact contract that we had already."

He added, "Capitalism seems to work up here but down here, not so much. What are we going to do, keep giving tax breaks, thinking it's going to trickle down. No, it's not going to trickle down, it didn't with Reagan and it never will. It is going to stay up there out of reach and we're going to stay where we're at...They just keep making more and more money and we're hurting from it."

At the Flint GM Assembly Plant, a worker stressed the international dimensions of the struggle. "We have a moral responsibility not only to our community and the workers whose faces we see every day but to the workers worldwide who provide the resources we use in this country. There is no such thing as an 'American car.' Forty percent of the parts we work with here come from Korea, Mexico and other countries.

"Workers are building \$150,000 trucks at this plant. There are no TPT or full-time tags on the trucks. We all build them. Why is a TPT getting less money than the guy right next to him? Why isn't he or she getting a pension too?"

Another worker added, "In 2019, we were on strike for six weeks and we didn't get anything. It was a dog and pony show run by UAW officials that were embezzling our money. We can't let that happen again."

A third Flint worker added, "The people on the floor should be in control. The UAW is a corporate entity just like GM. What we need is a global movement of the working people."

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