

Determination of autoworkers grows as confrontation against UAW bureaucracy and auto companies intensifies

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Anger and opposition are growing among autoworkers toward efforts of the United Auto Workers leadership, headed by union president Shawn Fain, to negotiate another sellout agreement with the Big Three auto companies and block a strike before the contract expiration on September 14.

Expressing their determination to both win back past concessions and make new gains in wages, benefits and working conditions, autoworkers are responding with increasing opposition to statements by Fain that he wants to “avoid a strike” and that the expectations of the rank and file need to be lowered because “you don’t always get everything you demand.”

As a temporary part-time (TPT) worker at a Detroit Stellantis plant told the WSWs, “People want to go on strike to show them we mean business. It should be all of us on strike at one time. That would definitely have more impact. These companies are literally working us into the ground. They don’t look at us as people. They utilize us for profit and that’s it. So, unless we stand up, it’s always going to be like that.”

The TPT worker continued, “We want to get things back like decent insurance, and no more tiers. We also want back all the other things that the UAW gave up. What a lot of people who are not involved with the automotive industry don’t understand is we used to have these things in the past. We’re essentially fighting for the bare minimum back. These are trillion-dollar companies, and they can more than afford it. All these companies want is profit, profit, profit and to take it all at our expense. But it’s not theirs, it’s ours.

“We want to strike but people don’t want to make this big sacrifice if they’re going to be sold out like the Clarios battery workers in Toledo. If we strike, we want to win.”

A veteran worker at the GM Components Holdings (GMCH) plant in western Michigan told the WSWs, “When we fight for the young workers to make top wages, we are fighting for ourselves. The temporary workers don’t get the pay, profit-sharing or benefits of full-time workers, but they are contributing to the profits the company gets.

“Right now, management can’t even get enough workers because you can get higher pay at a McDonald’s. They hire groups of 25-30 workers at a time and after 30 days, end up with five workers.”

Other workers have taken to social media to voice their opposition to any further concessions. One worker commented on the UAW’s Facebook page, “NO LUMP SUMS. We’re not interested. Temporary solution to a permanent problem. We want it by the hour!”

Another commented: “Just keep trashing all the BS offers. Prepare for strike. It’s now or never. They’re not going to get serious enough until after we’re out on strike anyway. And that first offer when we’re out on strike probably still wouldn’t be good enough. GMCH was on strike with us 4 years ago and didn’t receive any raises, still at top paid is \$22.50 an hour WHY!!!”

Additionally, a Ford Michigan Assembly Plant worker said, “I think Shawn Fain thought he could get some brownie points from the workers by saying he was going to fight for ending tiers, bringing back COLA, wage increases. He was claiming to be for the workers. To me, it looks like he said, ‘I’ll lead you to the end in this fight.’ But in reality, we’re all marching to the cliff, and he is falling behind and we’re at the edge of the cliff, but we’re not going to jump. We’re going to fight.

“Fain fed us high expectations with all his stunts—throwing contract offers in the garbage, no handshakes with the CEOs. Stunts! That’s all they were.

“The main issue is the workers need correct information. Why are they so secretive? What are they hiding? It’s no different than what happened to the Romeo workers when the plant closed. They were the last to know. All I can say is this is a fight for survival and the rank-and-file workers need the truth.”

The anger of autoworkers is fueled by decades of attacks on their living standards and working conditions imposed on them by GM, Ford and Stellantis (formerly Fiat-Chrysler) with the assistance of the UAW bureaucracy, beginning with the government bailout of Chrysler in 1979.

According to a report in Bloomberg on Thursday, “The average hourly wage for autoworkers on the production line has dropped 30 percent since 2003.” The report says one reason for the drop in average autoworker wages is the fact that more than half of US auto production is performed by the nonunion operations of foreign-based automakers and of Tesla Inc.

But the Bloomberg report goes on to say a cause of the fall in autoworker real wages is also “the two-tier wage system that the UAW first agreed to in 2007,” and that the union also “gave up” automatic cost-of-living adjustments in 2009 as part of the auto industry bailout engineered by the Obama administration. This concession “turned out to be a big sacrifice during the high inflation

of the past two years,” the article noted.

The figures for the decline in real wages of autoworkers would have been even worse if they included temporary workers, who start out at \$15-\$16 an hour and max out after four years at \$20. These workers pay UAW dues but have virtually no contractual rights.

Fain, UAW bureaucracy intensify efforts to block strikes at Big Three, Lear

Fully aware of the explosive sentiment for a fight among autoworkers, Fain and the rest of the UAW officialdom adopted rhetoric earlier on to keep workers in check and, at the appropriate time, prevent any mass struggle from breaking out against the auto corporations.

The UAW bureaucracy has been working behind the scenes to negotiate a contract with massive attacks on workers, above all the threat of tens if not hundreds of thousands of job cuts related to the transition to electric vehicles (EVs). With the contract deadline less than a week away, Fain is backtracking on his previous statements about striking and stating that the UAW is willing to drop workers’ demands to reach a settlement.

The real character of the UAW is shown by the unfolding struggle of autoworkers against the automotive seating company Lear Corporation in Hammond, Indiana. The workers voted 94 percent to go on strike and have twice voted down a sellout contract which would have raised minimum starting wages from \$15.50 to just \$17 per hour and includes major increases in weekly healthcare premiums.

Now, the UAW is demanding, for a third time, that the 1,000 Lear workers accept essentially the same, twice-rejected contract. One worker at the Hammond plant told the WSWS, “Lear Hammond plant (local 2335) is being forced into an onsite contract ratification vote after 100 percent of workers in attendance in the audience raised their hands to oppose this from happening at a special meeting held on Sept. 2nd. Bargaining committee continues to ignore the rank and file.”

The modus operandi of the UAW bureaucracy is that it will not take “no” for an answer and will continue to force workers to vote on the same rotten deal until they vote the “right” way. The same thing happened to the Clarios battery workers in Holland, Ohio, who successfully forced a walkout and twice voted down a sellout agreement proposed by the UAW. The workers were starved into submission by the union bureaucracy, which isolated and sabotaged their 40-day strike, and imposed a contract that included below-inflation raises and a new 12-hour workday with no overtime after eight hours.

These experiences are a warning and show why autoworkers must take the conduct of the contract fight with GM, Ford and Stellantis out of the hands of the UAW bureaucracy.

With little time left before the contract expiration, the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network is calling on autoworkers to take the initiative now to fight for their demands for all out strike action against the Big Three.

As Will Lehman, rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president last year, said in a call to action to autoworkers issued in a video on Thursday:

Fellow workers, we face a serious fight. The companies aren’t going to give an inch to workers willingly. Fain and the UAW bureaucrats aren’t putting forward a strategy, but the rank and file must, in order to take control of our struggle.

Lehman called on workers to form rank-and-file committees at their workplaces and take up the demands for these measures:

- **Raise strike pay to \$750 a week**
- **Make sure there is rank-and-file oversight of all the contract talks**
- **Release the full list of plants the companies are planning to close as well as all documents exchanged between the UAW, management, and Biden in the contract talks**
- **Prepare for an all-out nationwide strike on September 14**
- **Launch an internationally coordinated fight back**

It is clear from media reports on meetings between the UAW and the auto companies that the employers are taking an intransigent position and telling autoworkers that their demands are unaffordable.

According to Fain, GM’s counterproposal maintains the hated two-tier system, requires a six-year progression to top pay, rejects company-paid pensions and retiree healthcare benefits for second-tier workers, and maintains poverty wages for GMCH and CCA (Customer Care and Aftersales) warehouse workers. GM proposed an insulting 10 percent pay raise over four years and no restoration of cost-of-living allowances (COLA).

Fain said the company had rejected all of the UAW’s “job security” proposals, but said absolutely nothing about the company’s plans to shut plants, wipe out thousands of jobs and maintain poverty wages in new EV battery plants.

Despite his claims about “transparency,” Fain has given no updates on what the UAW conceded in its counterproposal to Ford earlier this week. That is because the bureaucracy fears if workers knew the truth it would have an open revolt on its hands. The *Washington Post* reported Thursday that Fain “has become more personally involved in talks with Ford in an effort to reach a deal, according to a person familiar with the negotiations.”

Fain and other UAW officials have been in daily discussions with the Biden administration, which oversaw the banning of a railroad strike last year and the recently imposed concessionary contracts on UPS and dockworkers. The discussions have focused on how to contain the explosive opposition of rank-and-file autoworkers, whether by imposing a last-minute deal to prevent a strike or calling a partial strike at a few plants before such a sellout.

If these efforts are to be defeated and the demands of workers won, rank-and-file workers must seize the initiative and expand the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network as the new center of power and decision-making in the plants.



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