

The UAW bureaucracy is making massive concessions behind autoworkers' backs

Eric London

11 September 2023

Sign up for text message updates on the Detroit Three contract fight by texting AUTO to (866) 847-1086.

Statements from the United Auto Workers, the Biden administration and the Big Three auto corporations make clear that a massive sellout is being worked out behind the backs of 150,000 autoworkers in the US whose contracts expire Thursday at 11:59 p.m. EDT.

Late Monday afternoon, *Automotive News* reported that the UAW is making major concessions on workers' central demands: "Days before it's threatening to strike the Detroit 3, the UAW has reduced its demand for pay raises over the next four years to the mid-30 percent range, according to people familiar with the offer." The pro-industry publication noted this "marks a willingness by the union to compromise on one of its top demands."

There is no doubt that the UAW bureaucracy is also planning to betray workers' demands for the abolition of tiers, an end to layoffs and plant closures, the restoration of fully funded pensions and cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) and the immediate rollover of all temporary part-time (TPT) workers.

The latest developments confirm: If these demands are to be won, the rank and file will have to fight for them. In every plant, workers who are prepared to fight for these demands must speak to one another, form rank-and-file committees, and share information and plan common action for when the contract expires. Adopting a "wait and see" approach would be fatal, because the latest backroom concessions show the bureaucrats cannot be trusted.

The UAW bureaucracy's moves toward a sellout agreement have produced a wave of enthusiasm in auto corporation boardrooms.

Stellantis's Senior Vice President for Human Relations Tobin Williams issued a statement Monday morning saying the company is "pleased to report that the Stellantis and UAW subcommittees have reached

tentative agreements in a number of important areas, including health and safety" and that "we are on a good path" toward reaching an agreement on economic issues. Williams said he was "proud" of the UAW bargaining team for their "commitment to reaching a fair agreement."

If the companies feel they are on a "good path," this means the rank and file is being led blindfolded toward disaster. Through the transition to electric vehicles, the auto corporations plan to cut hundreds of thousands of auto jobs in North America, and millions around the world. Entire towns and cities will be devastated, and autoworkers' children and grandchildren will be deprived of livelihoods.

Biden administration Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Wally Adeyemo also expressed optimism that workers would not strike when the contract expires Thursday night. He appeared on CNN Monday morning and said "it is the belief of the Biden administration" that a strike will be averted and a deal imposed that will "make sure the companies can continue to grow." He added, "We look forward to them reaching a resolution."

The UAW bureaucracy has kept rank-and-file workers in the dark and plans to continue doing so.

An email sent by the WSWS to Jonah Furman, director of the UAW Communications Department, asking for the details of what the union has already conceded and when UAW members would be informed has gone unanswered.

While claiming progress with the corporations, on Monday morning UAW President Shawn Fain abruptly cancelled plans to speak at a "national and local bargaining update" rally planned for workers in Kokomo, Indiana on September 13.

According to a Monday article in the *Free Press*, when Fain's name appeared on a rally leaflet distributed to workers in Kokomo, this "alarmed Detroit auto

executives,” who requested Fain remain in Detroit. Fain dutifully complied, with the *Free Press* noting, “Fain confirmed late Monday morning he is not planning to go to Kokomo” to provide bargaining updates to the membership there.

Fain spoke for 20 minutes at a Sunday night livestream without providing workers any information about the concessions he was making. He merely acknowledged “things are moving” in his discussions with the companies.

Fain told members they will need to accept the transition to electric vehicles: “We have to get behind this, we have to have a planet we can live on. Anyone that doesn’t understand where we are in the green economy battle hasn’t looked outside recently in my opinion,” he said, adding that “it has to be a just transition.”

But the transition to electric vehicles has far less to do with the environment than it does with helping the corporations cut labor costs and increase profits, and Fain is simply parroting the companies’ “green” propaganda.

The dark reality was revealed in a *Wall Street Journal* report Sunday noting the Biden administration has reached an agreement with Saudi Arabia to help the Big Three acquire the raw materials for EV batteries by developing mines across Africa. In other words, the “just transition” Fain and the Big Three are promoting will entail the Saudi monarchy buying African land on behalf of US corporations to destroy the environment and employ child laborers for lithium, cobalt, copper, tantalum and nickel.

Fain’s remarks Sunday came during an event hosted by the UAW and a series of non-profits associated with the Democratic Party.

During his remarks, Fain spoke of the contract campaign almost as a done deal, saying he was “very proud of the work that so many people have put into this, and our congresspeople that have supported us, like Rashida [Tlaib] and Debbie Dingell and so many of the different reps that we’ve had out there, Haley Stevens. They’re in the fight with us. They are there for you, they are in the fight with you, and I’m always proud to stand with these reps and leaders, they don’t forget their roots, that’s what this moment is all about.”

Fain is trying to pull the wool over workers’ eyes by praising these corporate politicians. According to Opensecrets.org, Haley Stevens placed third out of 535 members of congress in donations from the auto corporations in the 2022 election cycle. Stevens was elected to Congress after helping lead the Obama-Biden

administration’s Auto Task Force that oversaw massive job and wage cuts following the 2009 bailouts of the auto industry.

Democratic Congresswoman Debbie Dingell—also singled out for praise by Fain—is a former GM executive who received the fourth most in campaign contributions from auto corporations in 2022. Both have received tens of thousands of dollars from the auto companies over the years, and both voted to illegalize a potential strike by 110,000 railroad workers last year, and to enforce a contract the workers had rejected. Rashida Tlaib, long promoted by the UAW bureaucracy, has helped cover up the role the Democratic Party played under Obama when it restructured the auto industry with Stevens’ help.

The corporations and the corporate press are fearful that the rank and file might take matters into their own hands and rebel against the UAW bureaucracy. Expressing these concerns, the *Chicago Tribune* wrote in an editorial board statement last week:

“Fain’s huffing and puffing will be exposed as mere posturing if the Big Three and the union come together and make a deal in the days ahead. But belligerence can have consequences. Given how Fain has raised expectations, unless he can deliver on pie-in-the-sky demands such as a 46% pay hike over the life of the contract, a 32-hour workweek and platinum pension benefits, he will have a hard time winning approval from the members he has so aggressively revved up.”

Fain only adopted these proposals as a means to prevent an all-out rebellion by rank-and-file workers but never had any intention, let alone strategy, to fight for them.

What happens next will be determined by the rank and file, who occupy a critical position in the global supply chain and have immense potential power. This power can be unlocked through the building of rank-and-file committees in each and every workplace so that workers can share information, link up across plants and national borders, and unite in a common struggle for social equality.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact