

“The rank-and-file workforce needs to unite globally”: Big Three autoworkers in US and Mexico give voice to growing militancy in meeting Sunday

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Autoworkers from the US and Mexico expressed their overwhelming determination to unite and fight to ensure their needs are met in an online meeting hosted Sunday afternoon by the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network and the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*.

Workers at the meeting, titled “Countdown to the UAW-Big Three contract expiration: A strategy for workers to fight and win,” gave voice to the widespread anger and militancy created by the decades-long deterioration of autoworkers’ living standards and working conditions, with many denouncing the treachery of the United Auto Workers union bureaucracy.

The meeting advanced a perspective for workers to take the struggle into their own hands, warning that the administration of UAW President Shawn Fain was preparing another historic betrayal, as evidenced by the ongoing discussions between the UAW leadership, the White House and top Democratic Party officials.

Will Lehman, a worker at Mack Trucks who ran in last year’s UAW elections, addressed the meeting and summed up the need for workers to form rank-and-file committees, saying, “Rank-and-file committees are organizations of workers control, where workers speak to what’s actually going on in the plant. The real power is in the workforce on the shop floor.”

He continued, “Shawn Fain ran on transparency, but again, everything that’s going on is going on behind closed doors. And all we hear is his version of events as to what’s actually happening. We don’t actually know what’s going on. It’s a matter of taking power in our own hands and adopting an international perspective. Companies like Stellantis have plants all over the world. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees calls for a united struggle with workers everywhere.”

The desire for international unity and common action was repeatedly expressed by workers in the meeting.

A worker who had spent 24 years at the giant General Motors assembly complex in Silao, Mexico, told the meeting, “I was fired in 2019 for fighting for my rights. This coincided with the struggle

of the US workers in the US strike in GM.”

In 2019, a group of GM Silao defied attempts by management to speed up production and undercut the strike of GM workers in the US. The courageous stand taken by workers in Silao was met with a wave of firings and reprisals.

“And we’re still fighting,” the worker continued. “Currently, I’m still blacklisted and not able to get a job in the auto industry.

“We want to generate consciousness around the world so that they know what’s happening in Mexico. After the union that won the contract at GM Silao, called SINTTIA, there has not been any benefits for workers. Workers are unsatisfied.

“We support the struggle you in the United States are fighting for, and we demand that wages become equal across the board internationally.”

“The rank-and-file workforce needs to unite globally”

A Stellantis Toledo Jeep worker in Ohio remarked on the similarity of the experiences described by workers in the meeting. Referring to the plight of temporary workers, he explained, “The continual use of these temporary workers without any kind of determined amount of time to hire them in has created essentially a group of working poor, and these people are working six, seven days a week, 10-12 hour days, and are barely making it. And that is something that seriously needs to be addressed.

“As far as the UAW goes, in our plant, there has been zero presence out on the floor during this time, which would be a perfect time to come out and talk to people and try to get some ideas or maybe reassure some people. But that’s not happening.

“As rank-and-file workers go, we need to unite now more than ever, during this contract. We’re not just dealing with bureaucracy on the side of the automakers. We’re dealing with bureaucracy on the side of the UAW. Once you get beyond your local, it’s a big business. It’s a big business designed to give you the illusion that you are in charge. And that is simply not true.”

The worker also spoke strongly in favor of the need for workers to adopt an international strategy, explaining, “The rank-and-file workforce needs to unite globally as well. Everybody needs to understand that all of us around the world out on the floor are the same. We are in the same situation. We’re working the same jobs. We need to unite globally, and we need to have a standard to where come contract time when the auto company is threatening that they will move their business somewhere else because we are demanding too much, we need to leave them nowhere else to run.”

“Whatever we have to do to get the demands met, that’s what I’m willing to do”

Other workers at the meeting from Ford, GM and Stellantis also passionately denounced the horrendous conditions in the plants, particularly the intense exploitation of temporary workers, and expressed their resolve to organize and fight for real change.

Hannah, a temporary part-time worker from Stellantis Warren Truck, told the meeting, “I think now more than ever, we need to stand together and unify because the things that these companies are doing are just downright rotten. The conditions in the plants, they have to change, because this is not a way for anybody to live.

“What they’re putting me through, what they’re putting other TPTs through, it’s almost unbearable. I didn’t come to Stellantis to struggle like this.”

A full-time worker from Warren Truck added, “We’re making these \$60-100,000 vehicles, and we can’t even afford to really live.

“I struggle every day being just a single person. No help. Paying all these bills is overwhelming. We all talk about what we sacrifice. I sacrifice my body every time I clock in. Before I started working for the auto industry, I was perfectly healthy. But now I have so many aches and pains. I barely get sleep.

“This is a very historical moment,” she continued. “We need a change. The union officials, they’re making anywhere from \$100,000 on up off of our backs. Why shouldn’t we be making that type of money?”

“I work so hard to get to where I’m at, only to still struggle. Something is wrong with that picture. So whatever we have to do to get the demands met, that’s what I’m willing to do.”

“I don’t believe a word out of Shawn Fain’s mouth”

Other workers also voiced their distrust of the UAW bureaucracy, despite the claims of the “reform” administration of President Shawn Fain to be carrying out a fight.

A worker who transferred from the now-idle Stellantis Belvidere, Illinois assembly plant to the Toledo Jeep plant said, “When I came here to the Toledo plant, it was pretty mind blowing. To see what’s taking place, the 40, 50, 60 hours. It’s a

way just to work everybody to death.

“The thing is, management and the union are definitely working together. They do not care. I don’t believe a word that is coming out of Fain’s mouth at all.”

A Ford Dearborn Stamping worker added, “Shawn Fain has been meeting with Biden behind our backs. They’re planning to impose a pro-company sellout.

“Ford is demanding an all-temp workforce. It’s hard enough going in there, and you’re telling me they want more temps on top of what they have?”

“We need to prepare for all our strike action,” he continued. “We need strike pay at least at \$750, \$500 is not enough. We need to know everything about the negotiations, no backroom sellouts. They should be livestreamed, on YouTube and under rank-and-file control.

“These are global corporations. We need an international strategy, against Ford, all the Big Three. We need to unite workers around the world against the corporations, against war and these systems of control.”

“Build these rank-and-file committees”

A worker from GM Flint, speaking near the end, explained how the meeting impacted her thinking, stating, “As I’m listening to everybody speak, it’s like something from each person’s perspective would resonate with me. And as I sat here, I had so many different points to make. And finally, I had my lightbulb moment. What are we going to do about this? You know, we can’t keep going with this crap pay, and working 10 hours a day, five, six days a week.

“We do need to build these rank-and-file committees. We can accomplish something if we stick together. Just keep talking to people, spreading the word, get them to join.”



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