

UAW planning to sabotage autoworkers' struggle with isolated strikes

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Live updates on the contract struggle.

If the United Auto Workers calls a work stoppage at all, it will be a limited strike confined to only a few plants, sources inside the union told the *Detroit Free Press* Tuesday evening. “The UAW will run a strategic strike that targets only certain plants across all three Detroit automakers and then escalate actions at more plants in waves as negotiations continue over the days without a contract agreement, multiple sources told the *Detroit Free Press* on Tuesday,” the newspaper reported.

The news came as nearly 150,000 workers at General Motors, Ford and Stellantis are poised to walk out at 86 factories and warehouses across the United States when their contracts expire at 11:59 pm ET Thursday night.

The only thing “strategic” about such an approach—assuming the UAW bureaucracy does not announce “last-minute” deals at one or more companies—is that it is based on a strategy that will allow the company to continue producing and delivering highly profitable trucks and electric vehicles to dealers until parts run out.

Rather than joining together in a common struggle of all 150,000 workers and encouraging 18,000 Canadian autoworkers to join the strike when their contracts expire on September 18, the UAW bureaucracy aims to keep workers off the picket lines and haggling with state officials to collect unemployment benefits. This has the added benefit of protecting the UAW’s \$825 million strike fund, which has long been used as piggy bank by the corrupt UAW bureaucracy.

The report of the UAW’s plans for limiting strike action are the latest evidence that the bureaucracy is preparing a massive betrayal of workers’ demands. To oppose this, rank-and-file committees should be formed in each plant.

Workers should speak to each other on the shop floor Wednesday, share information and prepare a plan of common action once the contracts expire Thursday night.

For weeks, UAW President Shawn Fain has claimed the contract expiration was a “deadline, not a reference point,” and that the UAW would strike all three of the automakers to win workers’ demands, including a 40 percent pay hike, cost-of-living allowances (COLA), the abolition of tiers and the restoration of other gains handed over by the UAW bureaucracy in previous contracts.

The auto companies, which have made a combined \$300 billion since 2009, have rejected these demands out of hand. Instead, they have offered insulting pay raises that would do nothing to address the 19.3 percent decline in real hourly wage that workers have suffered since 2008. At the same time, the automakers are preparing to destroy tens if not hundreds of thousands of jobs as they transition to electric vehicles, along with creating a new cheap labor workforce in the EV battery plants.

In response, UAW officials have retreated from one proposal after the other, reducing wage demands to “the mid-30 percent” over four years, according to the *Automotive News*, dropping the demand for a 32-hour workweek with no loss of pay, and concealing from the membership the full scope of the planned EV jobs massacre. Despite claims about “transparency,” the UAW apparatus has kept the workers in the dark about what it has already given up.

Facing the prospect of spontaneous walkouts, local union officials have told workers not to walk out at midnight and instead wait until they hear from the UAW International. Rather than using the full power of the workers to break the resistance of the companies, any “strikes” called by the UAW bureaucracy would be designed to do as little damage as possible to the corporations.

“The strike plan was first rolled out to union leaders late last week and Monday, then to UAW Local leaders on Tuesday evening,” the *Free Press* reported. Fain is “expected to notify the membership Thursday night in the

Facebook Live broadcast on which locals are to walk off the job if there appears to be no new contract by then, two people who listened to Tuesday's call told the Free Press."

An unnamed union source told the *Free Press*, "They're calling it a stand-up strike as opposed to the sit-down strike in 1936 and '37. The intent is to strike the three strategically. It will turbo charge the leverage for our bargaining team because it'll keep the companies guessing. They won't know who we're going to go after or when."

"This is straight up bull crap," a Stellantis Warren Truck worker told the WSWS. "Why is the union stopping or limiting us from using all our power to fight these companies? The strike hasn't even started and they're defanging us. We are ready to walk out Thursday at midnight. We should be together and say, 'Hell no, we are still going to walk out together.' This is our livelihoods. We don't want to get played with dirty little tactics by Fain."

"We have to all walk out. That's the only way that this will work. We have to hit them hard, all at once."

There is a widespread sentiment in the working class for a broader strike. Workers at Mack Trucks, who are also UAW members, have voted overwhelmingly to strike when their contract expires in October, and 1,400 UAW members at health care insurer Blue Cross/Blue Shield walked out Tuesday night.

Last week, the *Automotive News*—which has close contact with the UAW bureaucracy—released a list of potential plants that would be involved in a limited strike. These include Ford's Livonia Transmission Plant and engine plants in Cleveland and Lima, Ohio. GM plants include Romulus Powertrain in Michigan, the Toledo, Ohio Propulsion Plant and Marion Metal Center in Indiana. Stellantis plants include the Kokomo Transmission Plant in Indiana and the Dundee Engine Plant in Michigan.

"Such a tactic would limit what the union would have to pay out on the picket line since workers at plants shuttered for parts shortages would not get strike pay," the industry publication stated. "But it could be fraught with legal risk, and people familiar with the matter say non-striking workers who get temporarily laid off would not be eligible for supplemental unemployment benefits from the automakers, and eligibility for traditional unemployment pay could vary based on state laws."

In other words, striking workers would be strung out on \$500 a week in strike pay and others making even less on state unemployment benefits. The UAW bureaucracy hopes this economic pressure would soften workers up for a sellout deal.

In 1998, the UAW called a 54-day strike by a few thousand workers at two General Motors plants in Flint. While the strike would eventually cost the company two

billion dollars, GM more than made up for that when the UAW sanctioned the spinning off of GM's Delphi parts division, which would go ahead and slash the wages and pensions of Delphi workers.

Faced with enormous opposition in 2007, the UAW called a three-day walkout at GM and six-hour strike at Chrysler. The two "Hollywood strikes" were followed by the introduction of the hated two-tier wage system and the payoff to the UAW bureaucracy through the formation of the company-funded UAW retiree health care trust.

Most infamously, the United Mine Workers abandoned national walkouts in the early 1980s and replaced them with "selective strikes," leading to disastrous defeats at AT Massey and Pittston and the virtual disappearance of the UMW in the coalfields.

A 10-day walkout by all 150,000 autoworkers would cost the companies \$989 million according to a projection by Anderson Economic Group. But the UAW bureaucracy is deliberately sabotaging the struggle as it colludes with the automakers and the Biden administration to secure the interests of the union apparatus in the EV transition.

Workers must prepare now to oppose this sabotage and expand the network of autoworkers' rank-and-file committees to countermand the illegitimate decisions of the UAW apparatus and assert the will of the workers on the shop floor. This means mobilizing workers in every plant to demand the immediate raising of strike pay to \$750 a week, the establishment of rank-and-file oversight over all negotiations and full reports to the membership, and the launching of an all-out strike when the contracts expire Thursday at 11:59 p.m.



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