

Shawn Fain orders vast majority of autoworkers to “keep working” if contract expires

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13 September 2023

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In a Facebook live event Wednesday evening, UAW President Shawn Fain said the Big Three have each rejected all the membership’s most basic demands. Nevertheless, Fain ordered the vast majority of rank-and-file workers to stay at work and keep production going while only a select few plants go on strike.

This is an admission that the UAW bureaucracy is selling autoworkers out by keeping them working on behalf of the Big Three. All Fain’s claims to represent a “break” from past corruption have been exposed as lies.

Fain told workers that even without a contract in place by midnight Thursday, “We will not strike all our facilities at once,” and that there will be limited strikes only “at a number of targeted locations.” Fain made clear the UAW apparatus will attempt to prevent workers from taking independent action: “You will strike only if called by national leadership to do so. If your local has not called, you are to keep working. This is extremely important.”

Fain said the UAW would force workers to work even without any contract: “You will be working under expired agreement, not an extension,” he said. “I know this is new for us. This plan only works if those who are not called out on strike keep working.”

Fain absurdly claimed that keeping production going

would give workers “leverage.” He called this a “stand-up strike” which he said is “whole new way to strike.” The term, Fain said, “recalls the movement that built our great union, the Sit-Down Strikes of 1937.”

But a “strike” that keeps production going is not a “stand up” strike, it is more like a “bend-over” strike.

Workers reacted with anger to Fain’s decision to divide plant against plant with comments on the Facebook stream. Comments included:

- “So why not strike everybody at the same time I’m confused hit them where it hurts!!!! The Union wanna keep that money for whatever reason!”
- “I don’t want to work with no contract! We’re United...one walks we all walk!!!”
- “What happened to standing together Shawn”
- “All of us or nothing! We want to hurt them, then we all go all 3!!! We are just threatening. That’s buying them more time!!! All or nothing!!!”
- “That really lets the company do what they want...”
- “What’s the point of this Strike then???”
- “This is bs... who wants to work under no contract!”
- “He sold us out!!! All of that big talk and he folded!”

After delivering his long, rambling and pious remarks, Fain announced he would respond to Facebook comments. However, he paused for a long time as he struggled to find a comment that was not hostile to his plan to sell workers out.

After a long, stunned silence, Fain responded defensively to the outpouring of rank-and-file anger: “I’m seeing some people saying we should go all out at once, but as I said this isn’t a decision made on a whim. It was a decision made by a lot of people that

have looked at all the options.”

In other words, the decision to sell out workers’ demands was a decision made by the corporations and the capitalist Democratic Party politicians Fain has been promoting. This includes pro-corporate puppets like Haley Stevens and Debbie Dingell, the auto industry’s third and fourth favorite politicians, according to election donation data.

During his livestream, Fain announced that he would hold a “rally” the day after the contract expires with Democratic Party politicians, including Bernie Sanders, whose primary responsibility will be to tell workers to trust Fain and follow the UAW leaders. Workers should recall that, last December, the Biden administration and both the Democratic and Republican parties voted to legalize a potential strike of 100,000 railroad workers, and forced them to accept a sellout contract they had already rejected.

Fain’s decision comes as the rank-and-file across industries indicate a growing desire to fight. Approximately 1,400 Blue Cross Blue Shield who are members of the UAW went on strike Wednesday morning in Michigan, just days after over 100 Dometic parts workers in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, initiated a strike.

In response to Fain’s announcement, many workers also expressed anger over the fact that a limited strike that leads to layoffs will leave workers ineligible for unemployment pay. In other words, the UAW bureaucracy’s strategy will impoverish workers, weaken the resolve of the rank and file and protect the UAW bureaucracy’s strike fund. As one worker said, “Only striking plants get [strike pay].... Most of us will be laid off and get nothing!! States are gonna deny the unemployment claims ...”

One additional legal issue is that by forcing workers to work without a contract, the UAW bureaucracy is putting workers at risk of wrongful termination or discipline, since federal law says workers have no recourse to take disciplinary matters to arbitration if wrongfully penalized.

In response to Fain’s speech, rank-and-file socialist candidate for UAW president Will Lehman issued the following statement:

“By announcing Wednesday that the UAW will only call limited ‘stand up strikes’ at a few plants even without a contract, UAW President Shawn Fain has

admitted that the UAW bureaucracy is selling out the rank-and-file.

“Fain is not calling on workers to ‘stand up.’ He is demanding that we lie down and accept what the companies want. The isolation of the strike to only a handful of plants will ensure that it is as ineffective as possible. By keeping production going, it will boost both corporate profits and the UAW strike fund, which the bureaucrats have raided for decades to pay their own bloated salaries.

“The decision against launching an all-out strike is not legitimate. It contradicts the clear will of the rank-and-file, which voted 97 percent to strike all three companies now. It was taken behind the backs of the rank-and-file membership, at the behest of the corporations and the Biden administration. It was announced by a president elected through massive voter suppression with the support of only 3 percent of the rank-and-file membership. Most workers never even received a ballot to vote last year.

“We cannot afford to leave things in the hands of these traitors!

“The UAW bureaucracy has made clear what side it is on. This means we, the rank-and-file, must organize ourselves. Hold emergency meetings in your factories and warehouses tonight and tomorrow to democratically discuss and plan how to countermand this betrayal and what collective action is needed. If there is no contract at midnight on Thursday night, we cannot be separated as Fain wants, we must all stand together—on strike!”



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