

Autoworkers demand all-out strike while UAW conspires with Biden to sell out struggle

Jerry White

17 September 2023

Sign up for text message updates on the Detroit Big Three contract fight by texting AUTO to (866) 847-1086. Fill out the form at the bottom of the article to join the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Network.

There is growing opposition among rank-and-file workers to the limited strike policy of the United Auto Workers. Workers are calling for an industry-wide strike by all 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers.

After the national labor agreements expired last Friday, UAW President Shawn Fain called out workers at two-and-a-half plants: the Stellantis Toledo Jeep Complex, GM's Wentzville plant near St. Louis and final assembly and paint departments at Ford's Michigan Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit.

"The CEOs are demonstrating their arrogance and greed for the whole world to see," a Toledo Jeep worker told the WSWS. "But calling out less than 10 percent of rank-and-file workers is allowing them to continue making money.

"There is widespread frustration at the facilities still working because those workers were part of the 97 percent of the members who voted to strike. At the same time, this 'stand up strike' has handed power to management to fire anyone for any reason because there are virtually no protections under an expired contract. Every rank-and-file worker in these plants has a target on their back because management wants to fire the highest paid and fill their plants with temporary workers \$16 an hour."

"This moment in history is the most opportune in decades to make our demands known to both the Big Three and the UAW bureaucracies," the Jeep worker said. "We need to inform the rank and file about what's going on, connect with them on the local, regional and international level, and stand up in an all-out strike to show them how powerful we are."

A third generation autoworker at the GM Flint Assembly plant said, "Fain compared his 'bottleneck

strike' to the Flint sit-down strike in the 1930s, which is an insult because the sit-downers stopped all production and took hold of GM's private property. They brought GM to its knees and gave birth to the UAW.

"This dumb strike strategy intentionally divides us and weakens our power. We don't need the UAW bureaucracy to tell us when to go on strike and certainly not when to come back from strike. The rank and file has to decide that. We need to strike together and not stop until we get what we deserve.

"GM CEO Mary Barra made \$28.9 million in 2022 which is 630 times what an average autoworker earns. All her profits are generated by us. But she says if she complies with our demands, the company will go bankrupt. It is time for us to take a stand and win."

"Everyone should go out," a Ford Chicago Assembly worker said, voicing support for an industry-wide strike. "Not just one. Stand out there with your brothers and sisters. We're all one. We all want equal rights, so, equal fight."

One of the more than 500 workers at the Clarios battery plant in Toledo, Ohio, whose 40-day strike was betrayed by the UAW bureaucracy added, "What's the point of only calling out 5-10 percent of the workforce? Far from this being a 'historic strike,' it is one of the lamest actions in history. It isn't putting any pressure on the companies. Fain is looking out for the corporations, not the members. There has to be an all-out strike."

Wall Street has largely shrugged off the UAW's ineffective action, with the auto companies' stocks rising after the strike began Friday. Analysts are saying that the companies stockpiled large numbers of vehicles from the plants now being struck.

On Sunday, Reuters reported that a strike could actually help GM address ongoing technical and operational issues in its electric vehicle and battery operations. "A production stoppage could allow GM to solve

bottlenecks,” Sam Fiorani, vice president of global vehicle forecasting at AutoForecast Solutions, told the news agency. “GM could ramp up output faster once the factories start running again.”

The corporations have used the isolated strikes to go on the offensive. On Friday, Ford said that, as a result of the partial strike at Michigan Assembly, it was temporarily laying off 600 workers at the rest of the plant. GM also warned that it would likely halt production at its Fairfax Assembly Plant in Kansas because the Wentzville work stoppage will lead to a shortage of parts at Fairfax. Under the expired contracts, these workers will not get supplementary unemployment benefits and will likely not receive state jobless benefits since the layoffs are due to a work stoppage. Fain said these workers “would not go without an income,” although the UAW’s paltry weekly strike pay of \$500 a week will do little to offset the loss of their jobs.

While Fain has threatened to expand the number of plants on strike, he dodged a question about “amping” up the strike during an appearance on CBS-TV’s “Face the Nation” Sunday, saying only, “We’re prepared to do what whatever we have to do.” While Fain claimed that Stellantis’ 21 percent pay offer over four years was a “no-go,” the UAW said on Saturday that negotiations were “reasonably” productive. But it has provided workers with no details on what workers’ demands the UAW has already abandoned.

Most significantly, Fain once again downplayed the massive job-cutting plans the automakers were preparing as they convert to electric vehicle production. Asked by host Margaret Brennan to comment on the Ford CEO’s claim that EVs would require 40 percent fewer workers, Fain repeated his mantra about needing a “just transition” to EVs and insisting that “labor cannot be left behind.”

In fact, the UAW has already agreed to the destruction of tens, if not hundreds of thousands of autoworkers’ jobs. It is only seeking a deal that will allow the UAW apparatus to preserve its financial and institutional interests, including being able to collect dues from the workers in the new EV plants who are going to be making poverty wages.

The Biden administration has announced that it is sending Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su and senior adviser Gene Sperling to Detroit early this week to “offer their full support” for a deal to end the strike. Keenly aware of the widespread opposition to Biden—who last year oversaw the outlawing of the strike by railroad workers and the imposition of a pro-company

contract—Fain tried to deny that the White House was intervening in the contract battle. But the White House officials are not coming to Detroit to go to the auto show.

In fact, Fain has been in regular contact with the White House, not over the terms of the new contract—which has already been agreed to—but on how to overcome the resistance of the rank and file. As former UAW President Bob King told a local Detroit news outlet on the eve of the contract expirations last week, “Fain has said over and over again, he doesn’t want a strike, he wants a settlement. But you know he can get a settlement and go to the membership, but if it doesn’t get ratified, what good is that?”

The bogus strike strategy is aimed at dividing rank-and-file workers, opening workers up to victimization and breaking their collective resistance. This is the plan of the auto companies, the Biden administration, the UAW apparatus and their pseudo-left publicity agents in the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). But rank-and-file workers are developing their own strategy.

On Sunday night, auto and auto parts workers in the US, Mexico and other countries attended the forum sponsored by the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committees Network. Workers discussed the statement, “Unite the rank and file for an all-out autoworkers strike!” issued Saturday by Will Lehman, the Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker who ran as a socialist candidate for UAW president last year.

“For there to be an all-out strike—which is what workers want—the rank and file ourselves will have to organize and prepare it,” Lehman said, calling on workers to form rank-and-file committees in every factory, elect leaders from the shop floor, and communicate with each other on the line, during breaks and after work.

“These committees will provide a means for workers to communicate with each other and share information, information which is being kept from us by the bureaucracy. They will provide a mechanism for us to link up across different plants and different companies, through the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network. They will also provide a way for us to unite with our brothers and sisters in Mexico, Canada and other countries, through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact