

UAW “Save the American Dream” rally in Detroit

Shawn Fain enlists Democrats to promote fraudulent “Stand-up Strike” strategy

Kevin Reed
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The UAW held a rally in downtown Detroit on Friday afternoon aimed at promoting the union’s non-striking “Stand-up Strike” that is keeping 90 percent of autoworkers on the job after the expiration of the Big Three contracts at midnight September 14.

UAW President Shawn Fain was joined on the platform by leading Democratic Party officials—Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer, US Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and US Representatives from Michigan Debbie Dingell, Haley Stevens and Rashida Tlaib—for the purpose of diverting attention away from the growing demands of the rank and file for a unified strike against GM, Ford and Stellantis by all 150,000 autoworkers.

The UAW rally also concealed from autoworkers the fact that the Fain leadership is coordinating its auto contract strategy with the Biden administration. Although this was not referred to during the rally, it was made evident by President Biden on Friday, when he announced the deployment of Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su and White House adviser Gene Sperling to Detroit to “offer their full support for the parties in reaching their contract.” Biden also said, “Let’s be clear. No one wants a strike. I’ll say it again, no one wants a strike.”

The “Save the American Dream” rally was a media event. It generated the necessary sound bites and fist pumping photo ops for Fain and the Democrats to posture—with the assistance of the corporate media—as opponents of auto company profits and masquerade as fighters for workers’ interests.

However, the relatively small crowd did not include many autoworkers. It was mostly made up of UAW bureaucrats, Democratic Party staffers and their middle class supporters among the pseudo-left political tendencies such as the Democratic Socialists of America.

The location and timing of the rally was also significant.

It was held near the entrance to the Detroit Auto Show at Huntington Place, which opened to the public on Wednesday. Beginning at 5:00 p.m., the rally coincided with the annual charity preview as the auto industry elite were arriving in their limos, tuxedos and gowns and they had to walk past rally’s stage to enter the venue.

Even more significantly, the rally was held in front of the UAW-Ford Joint Trusts Center, the building that houses the corporatist labor-management schemes through which Ford management funnels money to the UAW bureaucracy.

Governor Whitmer spoke first and said nothing about the conditions facing autoworkers or the present contract fight. Instead, she used the rally to promote a bogus claim that she is dedicated to “building a brighter future” where “every person has a path to prosperity.” Whitmer made these claims just as census data released last week showed median household income in Michigan declined in 2022 and poverty rates in working class communities such as Detroit and Flint have skyrocketed.

Clearly returning a favor to the UAW bureaucracy for endorsing her in the 2018 and 2022 Michigan gubernatorial elections, Whitmer concluded her one-and-a-half minute remarks with, “I am here with you, my brothers and sisters of the UAW.”

Shawn Fain then introduced Bernie Sanders as “one of the best warriors against the corporate class, the billionaire class.” Sanders’ speech highlighted the fact that the message of the rally was not aimed at autoworkers, but at the corporate and financial elite.

Sanders began by addressing himself to the UAW bureaucracy, saying, “The fight you are waging here ... is a fight to take on corporate greed and tell the people on top, this country belongs to all of us, not just a few.” As he has done repeatedly for more than a decade, Sanders

railed against the redistribution of wealth upward into the pockets of the billionaires without ever using the word capitalism.

At the same time, aware that the growing rebellion of autoworkers against the treachery of the UAW bureaucracy could spiral out of control, Sanders also appealed to the ruling class to recognize that the union apparatus is a vital tool for the maintenance of the capitalist system.

Sanders said he wanted to say a word to the CEOs of GM, Ford and Stellantis: “It is time for you to end your greed ... it is time to sit down and negotiate a fair contract.” Of course, Sanders did not spell out precisely what would be in a “fair contract.”

This is because if he were to do that, he would have to expose the fact that the agreement being negotiated behind the backs of autoworkers contains massive concessions on their wage and benefit demands and conceals from them the coming jobs massacre in the transition to EV auto production.

Sanders, the self-proclaimed Democratic Socialist, spoke for 20 minutes and readily admitted that “what the UAW is fighting for is not radical.” He added, “It is totally reasonable for autoworkers to finally receive a fair share of the record-breaking profits that their labor has produced” and called for an end to tiered wages and temporary employees at the Big Three.

However, Sanders also covered up the fact that the conditions facing auto workers today are the direct result of decades of betrayals by Solidarity House and that the union apparatus has integrated itself into the structure of corporate management and the US government.

The other speakers—Dingell, Stevens and Tlaib—all gave short expletive-laced speeches and referred to the horrendous conditions facing workers in the auto plants since the government bailout of 2008–2009, while covering up the role of the UAW in implementing the contracts that cut wages in half and laid the foundation for the greatest boom in auto profits in decades.

Stevens, who was the Obama administration’s auto bailout chief of staff when the UAW agreed to temporary employees and the tiered wages system, boasted about the fact that she rode to the rally in a bus full of union bureaucrats from the offices of UAW Region 1 in Warren, Michigan. This town is where the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly and Stellantis Warren Stamping plants are continuing to work while the Stellantis workers at Toledo Assembly are on the picket lines.

UAW President Fain was the final speaker at the Friday

rally. He boasted about the “13,000 autoworkers who were on strike,” without mentioning that he told the rest of the UAW membership to stay on the job, essentially scabbing on their own brothers and sisters.

Riffing off the phony anger of the prior speakers, Fain referred to the “working class” several times and said, “the corporate media is scared, the billionaire class is scared and the Big Three is scared.” A sure sign that a betrayal of autoworkers is well-underway behind closed doors, Fain shouted the “stand up” slogan multiple times but did not say anything about what being discussed in the ongoing negotiations with the auto companies.

Above all, the Democrats and the UAW came together at the “Save the American Dream” rally to contain and dissipate the enormous anger and militancy of autoworkers which has built up over decades of attacks on their living standards and basic rights. The development of a powerful rank-and-file movement requires an understanding among workers that Bernie Sanders and the Democrats are class enemies and cannot address their concerns and interests as representatives of the capitalist system.

As it pursues vital geopolitical and military aims against Russia and China, the US ruling class is utilizing the UAW bureaucracy and the Fain leadership to suppress the struggle of the working class. Above all, the Democrats and Republicans are virulently hostile to the development of the class struggle and especially the emergence of a politically conscious and organized socialist opposition within the working class.



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