

Fain announces Friday “deadline” for more walkouts as rank-and-file opposition mounts to UAW’s selective strike policy

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In a video statement posted Monday night, United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain said the UAW was setting a “new deadline” of Friday at noon for the auto companies to “work with us to make progress in negotiations,” or the UAW would call more union locals out on strike.

The announcement comes as rank-and-file opposition continues to mount against the UAW bureaucracy’s disastrous “stand up” strike policy. Even though workers voted by 97 percent to strike, the UAW has only called out 12,000 of its 146,000 members at GM, Ford and Stellantis, while ordering 90 percent of Big Three workers to remain on the job.

The UAW bureaucracy is deeply nervous about the mass pressure building up for an all-out strike. Fain and the UAW are seeking to placate workers in the US as long as possible with promises of expanding the struggle, while it prepares to spring a contract on them which will betray all of their demands.

The possibility that workers at Ford Motor Company in Canada will also walk out Tuesday and extend the struggle across the border is adding to sentiment among autoworkers across North America for expanding the fight. There are 18,000 Big Three workers in Canada.

However, the Unifor union in Canada is doing everything it can to sabotage a united struggle. Claiming they had “received a substantive offer from the employer minutes before the deadline,” the union announced they were extending negotiations with Ford for another 24 hours, instructing 5,600 workers to remain on the job. In a message earlier in the evening, they stated, “Unifor Ford members should remain on

shift UNLESS they receive explicit instructions from the union indicating otherwise.”

The automakers and Wall Street have largely shrugged off the UAW’s limited strikes in the US because they have accumulated large inventories before the contracts expired. At the same time, the companies have doubled down in their refusal to make any concessions to autoworkers.

The automakers are planning for massive job cuts as part of their transition to electric vehicles, plans which the UAW bureaucracy continues to conceal from workers. According to CNBC, the latest proposal from Stellantis includes proposals to close 18 Mopar parts and distribution facilities across the US, and repurpose the closed Belvidere, Illinois, assembly plant either to manufacture electric vehicle components or as a parts distribution hub. In either case, this would entail paying workers lower wages.

In his remarks Monday night, Fain presented his strike policy as a strategic master stroke. “That’s why last week, our brave union family at Wentzville Assembly, Toledo Assembly and final assembly and paint departments at Michigan Assembly were called on to stand up and go out on strike...Just as importantly, all the rest of you stayed on the job. That is the only way this strategy works.”

According to this absurd logic, autoworkers will have more leverage over the companies if the vast majority continue working without a contract, producing vehicles and profits for the automakers.

Fain continued, “We’re going to keep hitting the company where we need to, when we need to, and we’re not going to be waiting around forever while they drag this out.”

“Either the Big Three get down to business and work with us to make progress in negotiations, or more locals will be called on to stand up and go on strike. Between now and then more locals will be taking actions. Those on strike will remain on strike and those on the job will keep monitoring for unilateral changes by management, which are not allowed under an expired contract.”

In ordering workers in the non-striking factories to continue working under expired contracts, the UAW has opened them up to punitive measures, with workers being suspended and threatened with termination based on petty charges. Last Friday, workers at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant reported that 10 of their fellow workers were “walked out” of the suburban Detroit plant for using earbuds, not wearing safety glasses or other minor infractions.

The UAW welcomes these threats. Last week, it issued a letter to workers ordering them to follow management’s instructions and warning that refusing forced overtime, slowing production or taking any other solidarity actions with striking workers could lead to termination.

What is taking place between the companies and the UAW are not “negotiations” over the contracts, which the union bureaucracy worked out with the companies long ago. In reality, the discussions between management, the UAW and the White House are centered on how to stave off a complete rebellion by workers.

The UAW bureaucracy is meeting regularly with Biden administrations officials, including Acting Labor Secretary Julie Su and senior adviser Gene Sperling. Su and Sperling have come to Detroit to discuss how to break the militant resistance of rank-and-file workers to the corporations’ demands. The “stand up” strike policy is part of this effort, aimed at dividing workers, wearing them down and softening them up for a sellout contract that will be used to slash tens if not hundreds of thousands of auto industry jobs.

Expressing the anger of workers to this betrayal, a member of the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee told the WSWS, “An all-out strike is the only way for the auto companies to know that we’re not playing. We, the working class, on the floor have to say enough is enough, and get out of every plant. We can’t depend on the UAW bureaucracy. We have to depend on each other.

“We were all ready to strike together last Friday. Not in a million years did I think that less than 10 percent of the members would be on strike. The company is using petty things to fire workers because they’re in control. The rest of us are working four to five hours a week, no matter how far we have to drive to get to work.

“Who made up this ‘stand up strike’ nonsense? We’re just helping them stockpile their vehicles. All the UAW officials want is to keep our money and pay out as little as possible from the strike fund. We all need to go on strike, at every company in the US and around the world.”



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