

“Go full force”: Autoworkers press for all-out strike, as Biden intervenes to facilitate UAW sellout

Marcus Day
25 September 2023

Sign up for text message updates on the Big Three contract fight by texting AUTO to (866) 847-1086.

Frustration is growing among autoworkers at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis over the ineffectual character of the “stand up strikes” called by United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain. The UAW has ordered nearly 90 percent of its members at the Big Three to keep working without a contract, only calling out two and a half assembly plants on September 15. In a cynical move last Friday, Fain “expanded” the strike to GM and Stellantis parts distribution centers, which supply dealerships and have no impact on production.

In a clearly pre-orchestrated decision, Fain invited US President Biden to “join the picket line” in his livestream Friday, which Biden has stated he will do in Michigan this Tuesday. Biden’s visit, far from being a “show of support” for striking workers, is in reality aimed at ensuring the UAW bureaucracy has the situation under control and is putting the finishing touches on the announcement of a sellout deal at Ford.

In response to Biden’s claims to be the most “pro-union” president in history, a Toledo Jeep worker told the WSWWS Sunday, “The 115,000 railroad workers Biden prevented from striking might have something to say about that.

“Biden’s claims of encouraging a ‘win-win’ agreement between rank-and-file workers and the Big Three ring hollow,” he continued. “Tuesday’s visit is a win only for Biden and Fain. Fain has presented Biden with a campaign opportunity to help secure the vote of the working class and an opportunity for Fain to further promote himself, as opposed to the UAW rank-and-file membership he claims to represent.

“Between the purely symbolic ‘stand up strike,’ his alignment with the Biden administration and his failure to recognize the true wishes of the rank and file, Fain is proving himself to be a tool for the corporate and UAW bureaucracies, just as his predecessors did.”

A temporary part-time worker (TPT) from Stellantis Warren Truck in Michigan said, “Biden has no business on our picket lines. He is only for the corporations.

“This whole ‘stand up strike’ is BS, and it’s reckless having us workers make profit for companies who can easily dispose of us. It’s in the benefit of the company and not of the people that the company makes its profits off. None of us should believe in it, and we should stand firm for an all-out strike.”

In a statement last week, the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network called for emergency meetings to be held at each union local for workers to discuss and vote on resolutions demanding industry-

wide strike action.

Ford pauses construction on Marshall EV battery plant, after Fain claims “real progress” in contract talks

It is increasingly clear that the UAW is finalizing its preparations to announce an agreement with Ford Motor Company, one which will be completely in line with the company’s demands for massive attacks on jobs and wages.

On Friday, Fain claimed there had been “real progress” in contract talks with Ford and did not call out any more Ford facilities on strike. The corporate press and Wall Street analysts have taken this as an indication that an agreement may be announced with the company as early as this week.

In Canada, the Unifor union rammed through a sellout deal with Ford over the weekend in a blatantly anti-democratic manner, concealing the contents of its deal until ratification meetings Saturday, only providing limited contract “highlights” and preventing workers without up-to-date email addresses from voting.

The suggestion by Fain that the UAW is on the verge of winning a “historic,” once-in-a-generation contract from Ford on the basis of a pinprick strike is simply not credible. The UAW called out just the paint and final assembly departments of Ford Michigan Assembly on strike, with the vast majority of Ford’s operations and profit-making continuing uninterrupted over the past week. The shutdown had caused Ford to lose roughly 13,000 vehicles or just \$47 to \$61 million through last Thursday, according to a Deutsche Bank estimate—equivalent to *just .03 percent* of Ford’s 2022 revenue of \$158 billion.

Far from Ford being on the verge of conceding to workers’ demands, the company is instead planning to go on the offensive against workers’ jobs and wages, with the support once again of the UAW bureaucracy.

On Monday, Ford announced that it was pausing construction on its Marshall, Michigan, EV battery plant. “We’re pausing work and limiting spending on construction on the Marshall site, effective today, until we’re confident about our ability to competitively operate the plant,” the company said in a statement, adding, “We haven’t made any final decision about the planned investment there.”

UAW President Fain feigned shock and outrage at the

announcement, writing, “This is a shameful, barely-veiled threat by Ford to cut jobs. We are simply asking for a just transition to electric vehicles, and Ford is instead doubling down on their race to the bottom.”

In reality, the UAW bureaucracy is fully on board with the corporations’ attacks on jobs. The primary concern of the union apparatus is to secure an expanded flow of dues, with the support of the Biden administration, from low-paid workers at the EV battery plants.

Ford is furthest along among the Big Three automakers in restructuring as it transitions to electric vehicle production, having reorganized its operations into units centered on EVs (Ford Model e), traditional internal combustion engines (Ford Blue) and commercial vehicles (Ford Pro). Like GM and Stellantis, Ford has been expanding EV battery operations, demanding billions in tax incentives and handouts from state and national governments, while planning to create a new, even lower wage tier at these plants.

“We’ve got to fight together”: Ford Chicago workers call for all-out strike

A temporary full-time (TFT) worker at Ford’s Chicago Assembly Plant told the WSWS after the announcement, “I think if we go on strike together, it would really push the situation forward. They would see we were very serious that we’re fighting for the things we need. I’ve only been there a year. This is a historic strike. I would agree to an all-out strike and go full force to get what we need.”

“Today we got the news while we were at work that they’re not going to strike at all. They said they’re coming together to make an agreement. I think they’re putting BS together, so we won’t go on strike. They’re trying to buy time. They’re making us work while they come up with a plan.”

Another CAP worker with four years at the plant said, “We need to do an all-out strike. Earlier, I heard someone got a picket assignment. Everyone was anticipating that we were going to leave at 12 o’ clock.”

Speaking on the need to unite 170,000 autoworkers in the Big Three across the US and Canada, he added, “We all are one. We’ve got to fight together. We’re stronger together. Us being together, there’s nothing we can’t overcome.”

He spoke out on the gulf between rank-and-file workers on the floor and the UAW apparatus and management as well. “Let’s be honest. When we walk on the floor, all the workers operating on the jobs, coming in every day. They’re running themselves down. They have to go to medical—their hands hurt, their backs hurt, etc. Injuries happen all the time on the floor. And you look around on the floor and you see these official people walking. ... We’re on the line, and we’re hustling and bustling, and we’re getting paid the least.

“We pay our union dues; every employee is paying union dues every month. Where’s that money going? That’s so much money. They’re not fighting for us. Some of them making \$300,000, \$400,000 every year. When we first got hired, they said it starts with us. We are first. Why is it so hard to get what we want? It irks me. And they give us 500 cars a day, we get injured ... come on!”

He also spoke out on the silence of Fain and the UAW on the struggle of Lear workers, who have voted down three UAW-backed

contracts that impose poverty wages on them. “My sister said the same thing, she works at Lear. ...She asked, what’s going on? Why aren’t they saying anything about us?”

In response to rank-and-file autoworker Will Lehman’s statement calling for an all-out strike, he replied, “That’s exactly what I want to hear. We need to go all on strike. There’s nothing else we can do. If we do this together, instead of us being divided, we are powerful.

“We need more wages, we need better profit sharing, better COLA. Our cost of living is going up every year. There’s no more dollar stores. Everything is getting expensive. If we think about it, another five to 10 years, \$20-25/hour, you’re not going to make it. It’s really bad. Minimum wage ... when you think about it, people are not making enough off minimum wage.

“Rent’s going up every year a \$100. When you got cable, internet, all of it is going up. Every year. And I’ve worked here throughout the pandemic.”

In response to Fain and the UAW strategy of extremely limited strikes, he added, “We’re being blocked. These supervisors and general managers and executives and presidents and these union officials, these guys make six figures every year. We’re the ones on the floor, putting our blood, sweat and tears in. It’s a lot of pressure on us, building the cars. I believe we should make top dollar for what we make—at least \$40/hour.

“Enough is enough! UAW membership—We have to make a stand now. We all got to come together. All our dollars are getting wasted. They’re going where they’re not supposed to go. When we go on strike, I believe we should get what we should deserve. If it starts with us building the cars, why shouldn’t we get paid more? Why not?”

“I’m definitely ready for a change. I’m ready to go full throttle.”

A third worker with 11 years at CAP said, “This is the first time I’m going through something like this, but I do believe more than one company should have struck. We should have had more of a fire to get things going for us.

“The rich want to continue to get rich. Continuously we get in debt. The CEO of the company made almost \$200 million in the last decade. That’s insane. That’s one person in the whole company. They’ve made enough to generate wealth for multiple, multiple generations. The autoworkers are going further into debt. We’re making money for them hand over fist, making them richer.

“I’m going to be candid—it’s modern-day slavery. These guys are, the big wigs and billionaires, are exploiting us.

“The company is built from the bottom up, by us. We’ve been building these cars, and we can’t even afford them. I can’t even get the lowest quality Lincoln Aviator. I can’t even afford the base model. It’s definitely changed the morale of the workplace. I feel like if they want to say anything about quality or anything taking a hit ... then they should look at the quality of our lives. The quality of the cars decreases when the quality of our lives decreases.

“I believe we need an all-out strike to get what we need.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact