

Anger mounting against Fain's bogus strike policy, as UAW prepares to announce sellout deal with Ford

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The efforts by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy to keep 128,000 of its 146,000 members working during its so-called “stand up strike” against the Big Three automakers is generating growing resistance. Inside the non-striking factories, anger is mounting over the increase in line speeds, unjust suspensions and firings of workers who have no protections under expired contracts, and the reduction of hours, particularly for temporary workers already living on the edge of poverty.

There are many signs that UAW President Shawn Fain could announce a deal with Ford at any moment, including leaks from UAW sources to Detroit news media about “serious progress” being made towards a deal. At the same time, Fain is contending with a militant and determined rank and file, which is in no mood to accept a sellout. This opposition may lead the UAW president to call out workers at a few more plants as part of its bogus “stand up strike” policy.

According to the *Detroit Free Press*, “The UAW is planning to announce its next round of strike targets on Friday on Facebook Live, and ‘everything is on the table,’ according to a union source familiar with the situation.” Fain is scheduled to make the announcement at 10 a.m., “with the next group of workers set to strike at noon that day if there is not substantial progress in ongoing contract negotiations, said the source, who wasn’t able to speak publicly.”

If the UAW bureaucracy does feel it must call out more facilities on strike Friday, it will nevertheless keep the vast majority of its members working and producing profits for the companies, as it plays for more time to wear down the resistance of the rank and file.

Among workers in the non-striking factories anger is reaching a boiling point. The UAW’s decision to let its contracts with the Big Three expire has given a green light to management to victimize workers who have virtually no protections against unjust disciplinary measures. “People have been disappearing,”

a Ford worker at the Chicago Assembly Plant told the WSW. “They been trying any kind of trick to get you fired. They’re putting you under the gun. You could be late, or anything, there’s a lot of stuff going on. They’re being real petty.”

A worker at the Stellantis Warren Truck plant in suburban Detroit said, “We’re supposed to be on an all-out strike, but with this ‘stand up’ strike nonsense, they are increasing the numbers, playing with our lives, and workers are getting fed up with their games.”

Citing “real progress with Ford” last week, Fain excluded the company from the expansion of the strike to 5,600 workers at 38 GM and Stellantis parts distribution centers, which themselves did not have any impact on the production of these carmakers.

In Fain’s livestream last Friday, he avoided reference to many of workers’ central demands. The *Free Press* noted, “Fain made no mention Friday of the status of the union’s requests for a 40% wage increase across the life of the contract, of establishing a 32-hour work week, or reinstating pensions and retiree health care benefits, all of which indicate to industry experts that those issues might be close to being settled with the automakers or they are possibly off the table for now.”

The idea that the UAW bureaucrats could have achieved a “historic” contract with Ford after calling a strike at just one of the company’s two dozen assembly and component plants is absurd. In fact, the UAW didn’t even call out one entire plant at Ford, instead only “striking” the final assembly and paint departments at the Michigan Assembly Plant and bringing out fewer than 4,000 workers of the 54,000 UAW members at the company’s US operations.

Whatever additional costs the companies incur from the deal will be more than made up through plant closures, forced retirements of higher-paid workers and mass layoffs that the UAW bureaucracy has already agreed to as part of the transition to electric vehicle production.

Over the weekend, the Canadian auto union Unifor rammed through a deal covering 5,600 Ford workers, which maintains the two-tier wage and benefit system and includes a virtual freeze in real wages, with average annual raises of just 5

percent while inflation is currently at 4 percent. Unifor officials claim the deal passed by 54 percent, but the results are being challenged by rank-and-file workers. Workers charge that union officials defied voting rules and the union's constitution by sending emails to entice temporary workers with a \$4,000 signing bonus and ratifying the deal even though skilled trades workers voted it down.

On Tuesday, President Biden flew to Michigan to do a photo-op with Fain at GM's Willow Run parts distribution center to bolster the UAW bureaucracy and prepare the ground for the announcement of a deal, which the White House will declare is "historic" and a "win-win" for autoworkers and the corporations.

Fain, in turn, praised the president who banned the strike by railroad workers last year and was part of the Obama administration's 2009 restructuring of GM and Chrysler, which slashed new workers' wages in half, eliminated cost-of-living protections, and vastly expanded the exploitation of temporary workers. As part of that deal—which Fain, a member of the UAW-Chrysler negotiating team, supported—more than two dozen plants were closed, including GM's Willow Run plant, which employed 5,000 workers just 10 years before. Today, only 200 low-paid UAW members work at the parts warehouse.

“We need to all be out now”

Workers at GM's Flint Assembly Plant report that management has increased the line speed and production targets for its highly profitable pickup trucks. “The UAW is allowing management to push us to work harder,” a worker told the WSWS. “The lines are being sped up and the billboards that list our quotas have increased to 420 from the 387 to 400 range. Workers are complaining to the UAW shop chairman on the Local 598 app, but nothing is being answered, the chairman couldn't care less. The union is working with management. We're not on strike and the conditions are worsening. We need to all be out now.”

The UAW bureaucracy is also keeping workers in the factories amid a renewed upsurge of COVID-19, threatening the lives and long-term health of workers and their loved ones. “We're working across from people who are getting COVID,” the Warren Truck worker said. “There should be a mask mandate again, but they don't care about our lives, they just want us to keep producing trucks.”

Fain has claimed his strike strategy is aimed at keeping the companies off guard and guessing what will happen next. In fact, the UAW's policy is aimed at destabilizing workers, keeping them guessing day-by-day whether they will be working, collecting \$500 a week in strike pay or even less on unemployment benefits.

In a particularly ominous development, the companies, with the collusion of the UAW, are deliberately starving temporary workers with wages that start below \$16 an hour at Stellantis and max out at \$20.

“I have \$3.70 in the bank, and I worked a total of 12 hours last week,” one TPT told the WSWS. “The plant has been severely cutting hours. TPTs have been forced to leave with four hours pay, the full timers have been able to stay a handful of times so they can get what's called a short work week and get paid for 40 hours. TPTs don't get a short work week.”

The worker said this was being done to entice TPTs with a “signing bonus” to vote for a sellout contract. “We're not going to sign some rotten deal that's going to deprive us of a future,” the worker said defiantly.

There have also been increasing reports that picketing workers at parts distribution centers in Swartz Creek and Marysville, Michigan have been struck by vehicles driven by strikebreakers. The police have made no arrests in relation to the incidents.

The struggle of autoworkers is at a critical juncture. Everything depends on rank-and-file workers taking the initiative and turning the UAW's phony “stand up strike” into a real strike involving all 146,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers. Workers in every non-striking factory should communicate with each other and raise the demand for the immediate convening of emergency local union membership meetings, where workers can discuss and pass resolutions to call out all members in an industry-wide walkout.

Because such demands will be opposed by the UAW bureaucracy, workers should join and build the growing network of local rank-and-file committees to fight for an all-out strike. These committees are enabling workers to link together with workers in Canada and Mexico, under the coordination of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), to prepare North American-wide action to defend jobs and vastly improve the living standards and working conditions across the continent and internationally.



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