

UAW president again orders vast majority of Big Three autoworkers to continue working two weeks after contracts expired

Marcus Day
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In a Facebook Live video Friday morning, United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain reiterated his order that the vast majority of UAW members at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis continue working without contracts and producing profits for the companies.

Claiming there had been “significant progress” at the last minute with Stellantis, Fain did not call out any further facilities at the company, instead announcing walkouts only at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant and the GM Lansing Delta Township Plant. With just 7,000 workers at the two factories, the announcement means that 83 percent of UAW members—more than 120,000 workers—are still on the job two weeks after their contracts expired.

Fain’s announcement Friday is a continuation of the UAW’s cynical “stand up strike” policy, better termed a “stay at work order.” The UAW bureaucracy has deliberately avoided calling out the auto companies’ main profit-making centers, which produce pick-ups. This includes the Ford Dearborn and Kansas City plants, which produce the F-150s, the GM Flint and Fort Wayne plants (Chevy Silverados), and Stellantis Warren Truck and Sterling Heights Assembly (Dodge Rams).

Again demonstrating the UAW’s determination to prevent the strike from having any substantial impact on production, Fain specifically ordered the GM Lansing stamping plant at the Delta Township complex to continue working. Fain said, “Let me be clear, this is important. Lansing regional stamping will continue working.” The stamping plant supplies a number of critical assembly plants for GM, including Lansing Grand River and Flint in Michigan, Fort Wayne Assembly in Indiana, and GM Oshawa in Ontario, Canada.

The UAW bureaucracy is betraying the widespread desire among workers for an industry-wide strike to reverse decades of concessions. Acting on a strategy worked out in advance with management and the Biden administration, the UAW is seeking to placate workers with false promises of “expanding” the strike. This is intended to wear workers down and prepare the ground to announce contracts that will be completely in line with the

company’s demands for massive attacks on jobs and workers’ living standards.

Friday’s livestream underscores the urgency of the call by the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network for emergency mass meetings at union locals, so that workers can discuss and vote on resolutions demanding all-out strike action. To fight for this policy against the resistance of the UAW bureaucracy, the network is calling for workers to hold discussions and form rank-and-file committees at each facility.

Fain’s announcement that only two more assembly plants would be called out produced an outpouring of anger in the comments on the UAW’s livestream on Facebook.

“As long as the big MONEY plants continue to produce they are not going to deal with us appropriately,” one wrote.

Similar comments included:

“Everybody out! Let’s stop playing the guessing game!!!”

“Omg! He’s gonna let us work forever!! This is wrong!”

“Stop giving them more time! Shut them all down.”

“You’re giving them more time, while we are slaving.”

The UAW has called out just four-and-a-half assembly plants to date: Stellantis Toledo North, GM Wentzville, GM Lansing Delta, Ford Chicago and only the paint and final assembly departments of the Ford Michigan Assembly plant, with the rest of the plant being laid off by the company. Last Friday, Fain announced strikes at GM and Stellantis’ parts distribution centers, which solely supply dealerships and the after-market, and have no impact on production.

With the limited exception of Michigan Assembly, the UAW has refused to call out any production facilities in the Detroit metro area, which remains the center of the US auto industry, with tens of thousands employed in the auto and auto parts plants. The UAW leadership no doubt fears that striking further plants in Detroit could quickly trigger uncontrollable demands by workers throughout the region to join industrial action.

A striking Toledo Jeep worker told the WSWs, “Last week, Fain said Ford made ‘progress’ and they were spared from another pointless walkout. Now Stellantis is making questionable progress and they were spared. Fain is not calling out any workers in Detroit, the headquarters of the Big Three, because any strike there could spread. This is also too close to the UAW’s own headquarters, and Fain is avoiding that.”

The UAW livestream began after a 30-minute delay, which Fain claimed was due to a “a flurry of interest from the companies in addressing our significant bargaining issues.” In justifying not calling out any Stellantis facilities, Fain claimed that the company had offered “the 2009 cost of living allowance, the right not to cross the picket line, as well as the right to strike over product commitments and plant closures and outsourcing moratoriums.” Fain continued, “We are excited about this momentum at Stellantis and hope it continues.”

But in contrast to previous livestreams, Fain did not provide even cursory summaries of what the companies are supposedly demanding, nor did he make any reference to specific wage increases, pensions, retiree health care, or shorter workweeks.

Throughout the entire contract “negotiation” process, the UAW has kept workers completely in the dark on the concrete details of what the union has agreed to with the companies, including the corporations’ demands for huge job cuts in relation to the transition to electric vehicles.

In the clearest indication that the UAW apparatus is preparing a complete sellout, Fain again praised Biden’s trip to the picket lines last week, saying, “This week we were joined on the picket line by none other than the president of the United States. It was a historic day.”

In fact, Biden’s visit to the picket lines—during which he spoke for just 87 seconds—was aimed primarily at bolstering Fain and the UAW bureaucracy and ensuring that it is able to keep workers’ opposition under control.

The “historic” visit lauded by Fain is by a president who is a highly experienced political representative of the corporations and the rich. Biden played a key role in the 2009 restructuring of the auto industry, as vice president in the Obama administration, working with the UAW (including Fain) to enforce the tier system, slash wages of new-hires in half, eliminate COLA and lay off tens of thousands of workers. During Biden’s own presidency, he has overseen the ban on a strike by railroad workers last year and the imposition of a concessions contract workers had been voting against.

Ominously, Fain made repeated references to the GM Willow Run center that Biden visited and other auto plants as “arsenals of democracy,” referring to the conversion of automotive factories to military production during World War II. In the present, Washington is rapidly escalating its war against Russia in Ukraine, pouring tens of billions of dollars in military equipment into the country. Following the failure of the so-called Ukrainian “spring offensive,” there have been growing calls for “boots on the ground” by the corporate media.

Beyond its determination to impose the auto companies’ demands for low wages and the flexibility to decimate jobs, the Biden administration is centrally focused on ensuring that the class struggle is suppressed and does not undermine its war against Russia and plans for war against China. The White House has increasingly relied upon the union bureaucracies to block or isolate strikes so that they do not spread, with the Writers Guild of America unilaterally shutting down a walkout by Hollywood screenwriters this week before they have even voted on a tentative agreement.

The UAW’s efforts to limit strikes by autoworkers in the US and ensure a negligible impact on corporate profits has coincided with the efforts of the Unifor bureaucracy to ram through management’s demands on Big Three workers in Canada. Unifor’s anti-democratic conduct of a “ratification” vote at Ford last weekend has produced growing indignation among workers and calls for a re-vote.

Throughout the US and in other countries, anger in the working class continues to build over the impact of inflation, eroding wages, brutal working conditions, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and skyrocketing social inequality. Next week, 75,000 Kaiser Permanente workers are set to strike in the largest walkout by US healthcare workers in US history. Contracts for tens of thousands of other UAW members throughout the auto and auto parts industries are expiring in the coming weeks, including for 3,000 Mack Trucks workers in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Florida on Sunday night.

“They are afraid if they call out plants in Detroit, other workers would say, ‘Why aren’t we on strike?’” a Stellantis Warren Truck worker told the WWSWS. “It would be a domino effect and the strike would spread like wildfire to other plants the second one plant was called out.

“Ever since September 15, we were supposed to be on strike. It’s two weeks and we’re still not on strike, even though we voted 98 percent to strike. We can’t leave this in the hands of the UAW. I don’t want to wait and see what he will do. We have to beat him to the punch and stand up for ourselves.”

A Stellantis Kokomo Transmission worker in Indiana told the WWSWS, “This doesn’t help workers, it hurts us and helps prolong a strike that the workers can’t afford for very long. It’s almost like this is planned to prolong the strike and hurt autoworkers, and thus get in another concession contract. We’re being sold out yet again.”

“This is clearly a game that is geared not to hurt the Big Three but to hurt the workers,” the Toledo Jeep worker said, referring to Fain’s bogus “stand up strikes.”

“Considering that 97-98 percent of us voted to strike, there needs to be total transparency about what this ‘progress’ is. If it was up to the rank and file, if this was not good enough, we would shut the entire industry down. But apparently Fain thinks it’s up to him. We need an all-out strike now.”



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