“We need to all be out now”: Autoworkers demand all-out strike to break corporate resistance to their demands

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Two-and-a-half weeks since the expiration of their labor agreements, rank-and-file workers are increasingly coming to the realization that they must wage an uncompromising battle not just against the corporations, but also against their servants in the United Auto Workers bureaucracy.

In factories and on picket lines across the US, workers are discussing the dead end of UAW President Shawn Fain’s “stand up strike” policy—which has kept four out of every five UAW members at work producing profits for the corporations—and the need for an all-out strike by all 146,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers.

Thousands more workers are seeking to join the battle, at both the Big Three and elsewhere. At Mack Trucks, 3,500 UAW members in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Florida were set to walk out when their contract expired Sunday at 11:59 p.m., but the UAW announced a last-minute deal without releasing any details of the tentative agreement. An X (formerly Twitter) post by the UAW at 11:50 p.m. stated, “More details to come as members review the TA.”

Describing the mood of workers in the non-striking Big Three plants, Hannah, a young temporary part-time worker at a Stellantis plant in suburban Detroit and member of the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee, said:

> Most of the plant was on their phones watching Fain last Friday and waiting for him to call us out on strike. You could see the look of disappointment in everybody’s faces when he let them down again.
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> Now they’re not scheduling TPTs to work. Last week, I only worked 12 hours and my check was $198 for a whole week. My rent is due, and I’ve already gotten shut-off notices from the electric company. They are playing around and taking our money because they think we’ll be susceptible to some “signing bonus” when they try to sell us a rotten contract. But we’re not going for some BS contract. We need to all be out on strike now.

Rob, a striking worker at the Toledo Jeep Complex, spoke at an online forum sponsored by the Autoworker Rank-and-File Committee Network on Sunday. He said:

> From the very beginning of this “stand up strike,” Shawn Fain has taken away our greatest strength—our numbers. He consistently speaks about democracy, while denying the vast majority of the 98 percent of workers who voted to strike, democratically mind you, their very right to do so. This has left those still working without a contract completely vulnerable to the will of the very companies they voted to strike against.
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> We’re still in the dark over what Shawn Fain’s definition of “progress” actually is. Between the visit from President Biden, not striking the most profitable plants, not striking any new plants within the proximity of the Big Three’s headquarters or UAW headquarters, and the extremely corrupt ratification by Unifor with Ford in Canada, I think we’ll soon have our answer.
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> For those who have been left on the shop floor to fend for yourselves: you need to use your power to demand an immediate all-out strike. The squeakiest wheel gets the oil, so be deafening in your demands. The stand up strike has made it clear that now more than ever is the time to form rank-and-file committees.

He said rank-and-file committees would operate democratically, “giving all workers an equal voice and equal representation” to ensure that “decisions made by the committee reflect the interests and wishes of the majority, enhancing workers’ democratic participation within the workplace,” and “advocating for the rights and well-being of workers in the automotive industry.”

Latest “stand up strikes” continue to avoid Big Three profit centers, as companies refuse workers’ demands

Last Friday, Fain excluded Stellantis from further strike action, claiming the company had made a “serious proposal.” Instead, he called out an additional 7,000 workers at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant and the GM Delta Township Assembly Plant near Lansing, Michigan. He specifically ordered workers at the Lansing Regional stamping plant at the GM complex to remain on the job. While Fain gave no explanation for this, it is because a strike at the plant would halt the shipment of metal stampings to GM assembly plants in Flint, Michigan; Ft. Wayne, Indiana; and Oshawa, Ontario, which produce the company’s top-selling Silverado and Sierra pickups.

In fact, the UAW has deliberately not targeted any of the corporations’ biggest money-making operations, including Ford’s Dearborn Truck, Kansas City Assembly and Kentucky Truck plants, and Stellantis’ Warren Truck, Sterling Heights Assembly and Detroit Assembly Complex.

As Reuters wrote Friday, “The effect of the walkouts on the automakers has been relatively limited compared to the financial hit that would come from halting assembly lines that build Ford F-series, Chevy Silverados

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and Ram trucks." It cited a source "familiar with the UAW's thinking" that the strikes are "not meant to inflict maximum pain."

Despite Fain's claims about making "substantial progress" at the bargaining table, the corporate executives have not budged in their opposition to workers' core demands, including inflation-busting raises, the abolition of the two-tier wage and benefit system, and the restoration of pensions and retiree health benefits for workers hired after 2009, which the UAW gave up 14 years ago.

On Friday, GM CEO Mary Barra, who made $29 million last year, insisted the company has had a "historic contract" on the table for weeks, which "rewards our team members but does not put our company and their jobs at risk. Jeopardizing our future is something I will not do."

GM told 164 UAW members at its Parma Metal Center in Ohio and Marion Metal Center in Indiana that they "will have no work available" as of Monday. "The affected team members are not expected to return until the strike has been resolved," GM said in a statement, adding that the workers will not receive supplemental unemployment benefits. This follows the layoff of 2,000 workers when GM idled its Fairfax Assembly plant in Kansas because it could not get stampings made at the strikebound Wentzville plant near St. Louis.

Ford CEO Jim Farley ($21 million salary) warned that workers' demands would force the company to shift production of vehicles like the Explorer out of the United States, while the company's chief financial officer, John Lawler, said pensions that guarantee monthly benefits until a retiree dies were "a plan of the past," which Ford would never restore.

UAW denying strike pay to laid-off Lear workers who rejected three contracts

The strike at Ford's Chicago Assembly Plant is leading to the layoff of an undisclosed number of the 1,000 workers who produce seats at the nearby Lear plant in Hammond, Indiana, and likely hundreds more at Ford's nearby supplier park.

At Lear, rank-and-file workers have rejected three UAW-backed contracts that would have set starting wages at the poverty level of $17 an hour, limited raises for the top pay rate to just above 10 percent over three years, and substantially increased healthcare costs. Although the workers voted by 94 percent to strike, the UAW repeatedly extended the contracts and kept them on the job because a strike would have led to the shutdown of the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant.

Now, as one worker at the plant told the WSWS, Lear workers have been laid off and are being forced by the UAW to subsist on state unemployment. "Lear's UAW union bargaining team will not listen to their members' demands, yet is too cowardly to strike," the worker said. "Members are being denied our strike pay of $500 per week and have to settle for Indiana unemployment of $390 per week. This is due to the strike at nearby Ford Motor Company in south Chicago."

As for Stellantis, it has laid off 68 workers at its Toledo Machining Plant in Perrysburg, Ohio because of the strike at the nearby Jeep plant, and plans to lay off 300 employees at transmission and casting plants in Kokomo, Indiana.

A glowing tribute to Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares (2022 salary $24.8 million) in the *Wall Street Journal* makes clear that the deal the UAW bureaucracy is preparing to sign will result in a brutal attack on jobs and living standards. The company already has the highest profit margin in North America of any of the Big Three automakers, 16.4 percent in 2022 compared with 10.1 percent for GM and 8.4 percent for Ford. It also has the lowest starting wage, at $15.77 an hour.

"Now, Tavares's cost-conscious style has taken on new urgency amid the industry's transition to electric vehicles," the *Wall Street Journal* reports, citing the CEO's statement to reporters earlier this year that "If we stop working on cost, in this industry you go from hero to zero." In particular, the *Journal* notes, in this contract Tavares is going after "unplanned absenteeism" at plants like Warren Truck, which the company blames for "the higher manufacturing costs."

In March 2022, Tavares visited the Warren Truck plant and said that he should have "shut the plant a year-and-a-half ago." He demanded workers at the factory reduce costs by half over the next six months and asked the UAW for "input" on absenteeism and a cost-cutting plan. Shortly afterwards, the company eliminated the third shift at the plant without the slightest opposition from the UAW.

In fact, the real cause of the alleged "absenteeism" at the plant has been the ongoing spread of COVID-19, which has claimed the lives of many Warren Truck workers, as well as brutally long hours, the lack of paid time off to recuperate or care for children, and starting wages that are below what McDonald's pays.

In recent statements, Fain has notably dropped workers' demands for a 32-hour week with no loss of pay and the restoration of pensions and retiree healthcare. It is clear the UAW bureaucracy is preparing to sign a deal that betrays workers and then declare, like every other UAW administration over the last four decades, that this is necessary to "save jobs."

This was made clear in comments to the *Detroit Free Press* last week by Rich Boyer, a UAW vice president and head of the union's Stellantis department, who said, "The issue is job security and putting product into these plants in this country. You can give me a 50% raise, but if I have no job security, no place for these people to go, what does that matter? It matters nothing."

"The working class is in it together and we need to join together"

But opposition sentiment for an all-out strike to defend jobs *and* reverse decades of concessions is building among workers.

On the picket lines at Ford's Michigan Assembly Plant, striking workers and their supporters expressed their determination to fight. One worker said:

> This shouldn't go on much longer without doing a full walkout. I came here looking for a job that can provide for a whole family, which is what this used to be. I got married, and we are having a baby in April. I've been here two years, and I'm only making $20 an hour. I don't know if we can make it given the state of the US economy right now.
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> The top echelon gets all the money, and everyone else is waiting for scraps. The working class makes the economy run. Without us the economy collapses. With stock options, the CEOs of the Big Three made a combined $72 million last year. But they are "broke and can't give us a decent wage," they say. I agree with an all-out strike.

Kim McLendon, a healthcare worker whose sister is on strike, denounced both Biden and Trump for claiming they are on the side of autoworkers. She said:

> They advocate the politics of the rich who have lost all

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communication with the working class. The people making the cars can’t even afford to buy them.

The money that they spend on war they are taking from us. That should be spent on schools, medical programs, decent pensions and money for families. They are spending millions and billions of dollars to kill somebody while we are scraping for pennies to put gas in the car and buy food. It doesn’t matter whether you are white, black, green or purple. The working class is in it together and we need to join together. I support an all-out strike. I think a lot of people do.

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