

The UAW bureaucracy's fraudulent "stand-up" strike will end in a sellout of autoworkers

Marcus Day
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Join the next online meeting of the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network to discuss uniting workers for an all-out strike across the auto industry. Register here to attend.

The events of the past two weeks shed light on critical aspects of the present stage of the class struggle. On the one side, there is the growing movement by section after section of workers to make a breakthrough and reverse years of declining living standards. On the other side, it is becoming ever clearer that the union bureaucracies, under the direction of the Biden administration, are doing everything in their power to hold back and suppress the struggles of the working class.

Friday will mark three weeks of the fraudulent "stand-up strikes" forced on workers by the administration of United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain, who developed the plan in close consultation with the White House. These non-strikes have been designed by the bureaucracy to limit the impact to the corporations' profits as much as possible and keep the vast majority of UAW members at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis on the job.

The impact on the companies' bottom lines has been infinitesimal. The strike has only cost Ford \$145 million and General Motors \$191 million respectively, according to a report by JPMorgan on Monday. In 2022, Ford recorded revenue of \$158 *billion*, meaning the strike has led to lost sales of less than 0.1 percent so far. By comparison, the 40-day national GM strike in 2019—itsself isolated and ultimately sold out by the UAW bureaucracy—cost the company nearly \$4 billion.

As for the UAW's current strikes against just two GM assembly plants and the companies' parts distribution centers, CNBC noted Thursday that they have had "little to no direct effect," given GM's built-up inventory, with the company's third quarter sales actually *increasing* 21.4 percent compared to last year.

The UAW's limitation of strikes to just a handful of Big Three production plants has been carried out in defiance of the widespread sentiment among workers for all-out strike

action across the auto industry. Enough time has passed to show that what is involved is not a mistaken or ineffective tactic by the UAW, but rather a deliberate policy to divide and disempower workers in preparation for imposing the corporations' terms.

On Sunday, the UAW announced a tentative agreement with Mack Trucks 10 minutes before the previous contract expired, in an obviously predetermined decision. The UAW's announcement of a "last minute" deal at Mack was aimed above all at preventing a simultaneous strike by workers there and at the Big Three out of fear it would encourage calls for an industry-wide walkout.

Expressing their contempt for the rank and file, UAW officials have told Mack workers they will not release information about the agreement until ratification votes this Sunday, when the union plans to present only selective contract "highlights." The moves to keep its members in the dark until the last minute provoked immediate indignation among workers, including demands on social media for the full contract to be released and predictions, no doubt correct, that it is a sellout.

The conduct of the UAW apparatus and Fain's administration—blocking strikes, announcing 11th-hour agreements workers know nothing about, and making sure any walkouts remain extremely limited and toothless—is but one expression of a universal process. In every sector, in the US and in other countries, the union apparatuses are working overtime to suppress workers' opposition and prevent a unified struggle.

- On September 24, the Writers Guild of America announced it was unilaterally shutting down the 146-day strike by 11,000 screenwriters after reaching a deal with the studios and major streamers, before striking writers had seen, let alone voted on, the agreement.

- Also on September 24, Unifor declared ratification of a contract covering 5,600 Ford autoworkers in Canada, following a sham vote in which the union violated its own rules and constitution.

- On Wednesday, 77,000 Kaiser Permanente healthcare

workers are set to strike against low wages and dangerous understaffing, in a walkout which has been limited in advance to just three days by the healthcare unions.

Facing an increasingly confrontational working class, Biden, the self-described “most pro-union president” in history, has based his administration from the outset on a corporatist strategy, integrating the corporations, the union bureaucracies and the state to an even greater degree.

The corporatist integration of the unions and the state is epitomized by the relationship between Biden and the UAW President. The UAW leadership has been in constant communication with the White House, despite Fain’s claims that Biden is “not intervening” in the contract process.

Meanwhile, Biden, the lifelong political shill for the corporations, views Fain as a “kindred spirit,” the *Washington Post* reported Monday. Indeed, both presidents are centrally responsible for the disastrous situation autoworkers face today. The Obama-Biden administration restructured the auto industry in 2009 on the backs of workers—halving wages for new-hires, eliminating COLA and pensions, destroying thousands of jobs and closing plants—in deals worked out with the UAW which received the support of Fain, who was a member of the UAW-Chrysler National Bargaining Team.

To give a “left” facelift to the increasingly discredited UAW bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America have been elevated to an unprecedented degree. DSA members now serve in top positions in the UAW apparatus, serving as strategists and spokesmen for both the bureaucracy and the White House, with commensurate six-figure incomes and lucrative privileges for their services.

The ruling class’ ever-greater reliance on the union bureaucracies and the pseudo-left to contain social struggles is being driven by a series of intersecting crises, in particular the war against Russia and the eruption of class struggle.

Biden recognizes that he is fighting a war on two fronts. Washington is rapidly escalating its war against Russia in Ukraine, with increasingly strident calls in the media and political establishment for US and NATO “boots on the ground” following the disastrous failure of Ukraine’s “counter-offensive.” Plans are also far advanced for war against China, which US imperialism views as its chief economic rival.

At the same time, the Biden administration and both political parties are carrying out a conscious war against the working class, which is being driven on by its war policy abroad. The US ruling class must finance its massive expenditures on the war against Russia, the military build-up against China and the US national-security apparatus as a whole—upwards of \$1 trillion a year—from somewhere, and it

is seeking to impose these costs on workers through relentless attacks on wages and social programs.

The containment of workers’ struggles is thus critical not just for the specific profit interests of the companies involved, but to prevent a movement of the working class from undermining the war policy of US imperialism. This is why the UAW and other union bureaucracies are totally concentrated on suppressing the class struggle. And this is what is behind Fain’s ominous allusions to the conversion of GM factories during World War II to war-time production during Biden’s trip to the picket lines last week.

Any attempt to pressure Fain and the UAW apparatus, or their counterparts in other unions, will prove to be a dead end. What is needed is the program called for by Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and candidate for UAW president last year: abolishing the UAW bureaucracy entirely and transferring all power to the rank and file. The network of autoworkers rank-and-file committees must be expanded and must prepare now to override the efforts of the UAW apparatus to force through a contract, which it will inevitably seek to do, whether through lies or vote-rigging.

But autoworkers face not only an economic struggle. The fight they are engaged in is fundamentally a political one. The working class must come to recognize that they are fighting a socio-economic system—capitalism—which is completely and irreconcilably opposed to their basic interests, and dedicated to their ever-greater impoverishment. It is a system which must be overturned and replaced with one based on the needs of the majority of society: socialism.



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