

With pressure mounting for all-out auto strike, UAW calls out 8,700 workers at Ford Kentucky Truck Plant

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Facing mounting demands from rank-and-file workers for an all-out strike, United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain called out 8,700 workers at the Ford Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville Wednesday. Workers received no advance notice and were told to walk out of the giant plant yesterday evening, with UAW Local 862 hastily organizing pickets.

While there was widespread enthusiasm among workers over finally walking out, Fain's sudden move is an attempt to get ahead of the growing revolt against his "stand up strike" policy, which has kept the vast majority of GM, Ford and Stellantis workers on the job since their contracts expired September 15. Even with the KTP workers out now, there are only 34,000—or 23 percent—of the 146,000 Big Three workers on strike.

"Some people are worried about how they will be able to support their families but a lot of people are OK with the strike and wishing there will be progress with this contract," a KTP worker told the WSW. "I do not believe I'm getting an honest day's pay. I want the outcome to be where I am paid what I am worth."

Another KTP worker described conditions in the plant, saying workers are pushed beyond their physical limits. When they fail to keep pace on the assembly line, they get written up, suspended or even terminated. "I was on a job that was timed for 43 seconds. It was a super physical, impossible job, under a lot of pressure. The union did nothing. They act like their hands are tied by the contract. The work we do takes a toll on your body."

Workers at KTP produce heavy duty F-Series trucks and Ford Expedition and Lincoln Navigator large SUVs. The Expedition has one of the largest inventories of any of the top 30 selling models, with 119 days' supply. Once again, Fain did not call out workers at the Dearborn, Michigan, or Kansas City assembly plants, which produce Ford's top-selling F-150 pickups.

Previous to KTP, the UAW only called Ford workers out at one and a half plants in Michigan and Illinois. The UAW

has largely spared the company, claiming that "significant progress" had been made towards reaching a contract.

Now, the UAW claims, talks have "broken down." David Firkins, Bargaining Committee Person for UAW Local 862, told the *Louisville Courier Journal* that the International UAW went to the table to negotiate with Ford Wednesday, but the automaker was not willing to negotiate. Around 6 p.m., Firkins got a call from Fain, UAW Vice President Chuck Browning, and Jon Jagers, a national negotiator out of Local 862, telling him "We're going to walk the plant tonight," the newspaper reported. "Firkins said what it comes down to is Ford is not willing to negotiate battery plants and ensure a 'just transition' for workers."

In fact, the "transformative agreement" that the UAW claimed it reached with GM last week to include its EV battery plants in the national UAW agreement will only ensure that the low-paid workers in these plants will pay dues to the UAW. In exchange for this supposed "just transition," the UAW bureaucracy has already agreed to the shutdown of dozens of plants and the elimination of tens of thousands of jobs.

The UAW has promised the Biden White House that it would control the autoworkers and end the strike, and the union is every bit as intent as the Big Three on keeping workers under contract and on the line. However, to contain what is now undeniably a rebellion of the rank and file, it must appear to have waged a fight and to have secured concessions prior to any contract agreement. Viewed in this light, Fain's late move to add a major plant should be taken as a warning to autoworkers that a sellout could be soon announced.

The UAW bureaucracy is also trying to regain credibility after the staggering rebuke it received from Mack Truck workers, who voted by a three-to-one margin last Sunday to defeat a contract endorsed by Fain as a "record contract in the heavy truck industry." Opposition to the sellout was organized by Will Lehman, who ran as socialist candidate

for UAW president last year on the program of transferring power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shopfloor, and the Mack Trucks Rank-and-File Committee.

Nearly 4,000 Mack workers in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Florida went out on strike Monday. The Mack Trucks Rank-and-File Committee issued an open letter to Fain on Tuesday, demanding an all-out strike at the Big Three so workers in both the auto and truck manufacturing industries could win their just demands.

A striking worker at the Macungie plant and member of the rank-and-file committee told the WSWS, “We were upset that they put an extension and didn’t honor our vote to strike. Once we found out that the contract does nothing for us and had no benefit for the workers who have been screwed over the last 10 years, we voted it down.”

“We’re trying to unite with the workers in the Big Three because we’re all fed up. Now is the time. The fact that the workers who build the pickups for Ford and the other companies are not part of this strike is wrong.

“It would be a lot better if it was all of us, joining together and standing together. That would get us a much better outcome. It would let the companies know they can’t treat us this way and that we will stand together to fight for our rights. We need COLA and everything else the companies are fighting against us to get.

“There is nothing being said in the media about ongoing negotiations,” he added. “We need to get the information about what is going on. We also need to get our open letter out so workers can learn about our strike.”

Fain’s “Stand-up strike” strategy: Profits for the Big Three, layoffs for autoworkers

Since the strike’s start on September 15, financial analysts have noted that it has done little impede either production or profits. This sort of “nothing to see here” commentary in the business press has continued. A *Wall Street Journal* article published Wednesday reported that when “UAW President Shawn Fain didn’t escalate a walkout last Friday as had been expected [that] GM’s shares have since risen about 4 percent.”

While Fain and the UAW keep workers on the job who voted overwhelmingly to strike, those same workers are vulnerable to retaliatory layoffs by the corporations. This was confirmed by a CBS MoneyWatch report issued Wednesday, which noted that the Big Three are laying off thousands of UAW workers under the claim that the plants have been hurt by the UAW’s policy of isolated strikes.

“Automakers say they are forced to lay off those workers because their job tasks are tied to factories the UAW has called on to strike,” the report notes.

On Monday, Stellantis laid off 570 workers at plants in Indiana and Michigan, Ford laid off 537 in Michigan and Ohio, and GM laid off another 155 in Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio. All told, auto workers laid off during the “stand up strike” so far include 2,330 at General Motors, 1,865 at Ford, and 640 at Stellantis.

Those men and women laid off—4,835 in all—could have been workers on strike. Now they are workers without jobs. Any strike settlement must include the restoration of their jobs, with full pay for the days lost.

Meanwhile, Fain’s “stand up” strategy has left the most crucial Big Three plants in full production, singling out for strikes those that cause the least disruption to the industry—and to the profits of the CEOs and shareholders.

UAW to striking Jeep workers: Visit the food pantry

While the UAW sits on a massive strike fund and over \$1 billion in assets, it distributed a flier to striking Jeep workers advising them to seek food assistance from charities including the Toledo Northwestern Ohio Food Bank.

The pamphlet also lists “hotline” phone numbers with United Way and another regional charity so that workers can “get help finding resources” for “energy bills, housing, etc..” It even lists two phone numbers for “Domestic Violence Shelters.”

One of the tried-and-true ways the UAW undermines the strikes it nominally leads is by stringing workers out on the meager strike pay of \$500 per week. It does so by claiming that anything more than starvation strike pay will undermine its “strike fund.”

The WSWS exposed all of the UAW’s claims about its strike fund in an article titled “Six facts autoworkers need to know about the UAW strike fund.” It started with the fact that the \$825 million strike fund could sustain all 146,000 UAW members at the Detroit Three automakers at \$500 per week for 11 weeks and \$750 per week for seven weeks.



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