

UAW president refuses to expand strikes, while ascribing rank-and-file opposition to management propaganda

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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.

In a Facebook livestream broadcast Friday afternoon, United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain claimed there had been “serious movement” in contract talks with Ford, Stellantis and General Motors and did not call out any further plants on strike.

The announcement means that approximately 75 percent of UAW members at the Big Three were ordered to continue working for a sixth week without a contract. Fain and the UAW have only called out one plant—Ford Kentucky Truck—since the beginning of October.

Still reeling after the overwhelming vote by Mack Trucks workers to reject a contract recommended by Fain, the UAW remains in damage control mode. The livestream was once again dedicated to defensive attempts by Fain to respond to increasingly angry criticisms by workers of the UAW’s extremely limited “stand-up strikes.”

The livestream opened with a video about the strike at Mack Trucks. While it contained clips of rank-and-file workers speaking in opposition to the contract, it failed to mention that the UAW national and local leadership had tried to ram through a sellout deal which contained below-inflation raises, no COLA and a lengthened workday.

In the live portion of the event, Fain ominously warned of “divisions” and “doubts” in the UAW leadership being sowed by the company.

Faced with rising dissatisfaction over his treacherous “stand-up strike” policy, Fain is trying to gaslight workers and suggest that any criticisms of the UAW apparatus are being fomented by management. But the reality is that rank-and-file opposition is growing because Fain and the UAW bureaucracy are working in concert with and to the benefit of the corporations.

Fain could not explain the obvious contradiction between his statement during the livestream that workers’ ability to withhold their labor is their “leverage” and “path to victory” and the fact the UAW is disempowering that leverage and blocking the path to victory by keeping 75 percent of its Big

Three members on the job.

He praised the “movement” from the auto companies and went on to imply that a contract settlement could be announced in days, claiming that the UAW was in an “aggressive push for the last mile.” This possibility was underscored by the announcement of agreements at ZF in Alabama and Faubert in Newton Iowa. Meanwhile, the contract for 1,100 General Dynamics defense industry workers in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania expires at 11:59 p.m. on Sunday, October 22.

The UAW apparatus is clearly aware of the enormous social anger over the US-backed wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Seeking to pay lip service to antiwar sentiment, Fain declared, “At a time when there’s endless money for war, somehow there’s still no money for the working class.”

Fain said this as though he and the UAW apparatus were not relentlessly promoting and conspiring with the White House and the Democratic Party, who are in the middle of a massive escalation of war throughout Eastern Europe and the Middle East and preparations for war with China, this week calling for an additional \$100 billion in Pentagon funding and military aid for Ukraine and Israel.

In recent weeks both Fain and Biden have referenced the phrase “arsenal of democracy,” signifying the massive conversion of US industry, including auto plants, to military production during World War II. At that time, the UAW enforced the militarization of labor by imposing a no-strike pledge, the erosion of wages, speedup and overtime in the interests of a war economy.

“Is Shawn Fain on \$500 a week too?”

Fain’s speech again evoked angry comments on Facebook. In one of the most “liked” on the UAW’s livestream, a worker wrote, “Is Shawn Fain on \$500 a week too like those that have been striking for the last 30 days plus? The stand up strike seemed cool at first, but now I feel so bad for those that started

this and have been on the picket lines with no end in sight. Hit more plants, end this thing and get people back to work!”

Another posted, “Show us the whole offer.”

Workers who spoke to the WSWS expressed frustration that Fain was not giving them any information. A young GM Flint worker said, “It was all fluff talk! But no real info. No new plants were called out.” Another GM worker, referring to the regular delays in the UAW livestreams, said, “If we were late as many times as Fain is, we wouldn’t have a job. Who does he think he is?”

Contrary to Fain’s claims, the UAW is not holding out for better pay and benefits for workers. Whatever the bureaucracy has already agreed to will fall far short of recouping what workers have lost over the past 30-40 years. The companies fully expect to offset whatever modest raises are granted with attacks on jobs and greater use of temps.

The UAW bureaucracy is holding out for nothing but its own institutional interests, that is, the “right” to collect dues from workers at the new electric vehicle (EV) plants.

The UAW’s EV battery plant deal at GM

Prior to the livestream, Reuters published a very revealing article exposing the reality behind Fain’s talk about securing a “just transition” to EV production.

Two weeks ago, Fain reported that he had cancelled a planned walkout by workers at GM’s assembly plant in Arlington, Texas, citing an agreement by GM to bring battery plants under the UAW national contract agreement. However, a report Friday by Reuters indicates that the question of UAW representation at future battery plants is still a major point of contention.

Reuters reported that the “breakthrough” agreement with GM announced earlier by Fain would entail setting up Ultium workers as a separate “bargaining unit” under the UAW’s master contract with GM. The report makes clear that Ultium workers would be relegated to a new low-wage tier, noting that the deal would establish “a joint monitoring body and flexible wages bound up with output, government subsidies and competitor costs.” In other words, Ultium workers would be directly pitted in a race to the bottom against workers at nonunion Tesla and other lower-wage competitors.

To the extent that there are conflicts between the UAW apparatus and management over the EV battery plants, it is over how to divvy up billions of dollars in government subsidies, with the UAW bureaucracy angling to get a sizable share for itself. As is always the case, the UAW, in order to get its hand in the till, is prepared to bargain away the wages, working conditions and benefits of workers it nominally represents.

Reuters noted, “Running at full capacity, the plant [Ultium]

could generate an average of \$337 in subsidies per worker per hour.

“GM told investors last year that U.S. subsidies could add \$3,500 to \$5,500 per vehicle in pre-tax profit for each EV it sold.”

GM and other automakers are insisting that their EV operations must be “competitive with Tesla and other battery manufacturers whose U.S. operations will get the same federal subsidies, but have more flexible work rules and pay less than the \$32 an hour top wage earned by UAW workers in Detroit Three factories.”

One possibility being floated is for an agreement to offer jobs at battery plants to workers being downsized from UAW-represented factories, such as Stellantis Belvidere Assembly. Under the terms currently being discussed, this could well entail huge cuts to wages for these relocated workers.

The autoworkers’ struggle is at a crossroads. Any contract agreement reached by the UAW apparatus under conditions where the full power of the membership is not mobilized can only be a massive betrayal. The auto companies are on the offensive, while the UAW orders the vast majority of workers to stay on the job, producing profits for the stockholders.

According to reports in the financial press, the strikes have had minimal impacts on the bottom lines of the auto companies. A JPMorgan analyst recently put the cost at \$500 million for Ford and GM, equivalent to just 1 percent of the companies’ 2022 sales. By contrast, Ford alone paid out \$3.8 billion in dividends in the first half of 2023.

To stop the sabotage of their fight and to win their demands, workers have to take control of the struggle into their own hands through expansion of the network of rank-and-file committees, which are fighting to transfer power from the UAW bureaucracy to workers on the shop floor. These committees should prepare to oppose the coming UAW sellout and fight for the convening of meetings to vote on all-out strike action across the auto industry.



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