

Federal mediator intervenes in attempt to shut down strike of Eaton workers

George Kirby
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United Auto Workers officials held talks with a federal mediator Wednesday amid an information blackout. Workers at the Eaton Aerospace plant in Jackson, Michigan, are entering their fifth week on strike.

The strike by 525 workers, who make critical components for military and commercial aircraft, coincides with the ongoing strike by 33,000 Boeing workers on the West Coast and 5,000 workers at Textron Aviation in Wichita, Kansas. The walkouts at key defense contractors have raised concerns in the White House, as they threaten to interfere with the plans of the Biden administration for war with Iran and escalating conflict against Russia. Labor Secretary Julie Su has been sent to impose a settlement in the Boeing strike. This follows the intervention by the Biden administration to shut down the strike by East Coast longshore workers last month.

Federal mediation in the Eaton Aerospace strike is a clear indication that the Biden administration is seeking to use the UAW apparatus to shut down that strike as well.

Eaton has refused to back off demands for higher health care costs, attacks on pensions and the creation of a new lower tier of workers. But workers have remained defiant. Under these conditions, the role of the federal mediator is not to pressure management to relent, but to shut down and impose a pro-company contract.

It poses sharply the need for workers to take conduct of the strike into their own hands to prevent a sellout by constructing a rank-and-file committee independent of the UAW apparatus and management.

The strike has taken on a bitter and protracted character. On September 28, a young Eaton worker, Seth Webb, was killed and several other workers were injured when a vehicle involved in a street race near the factory lost control and crashed into a group of pickets. Two other workers, Kyle Alger, 29, and Aaron Fraser, 27, were critically injured. Alger was still hospitalized in critical but stable condition at last report.

Meanwhile, striking Eaton workers are only receiving \$500 before taxes in strike pay while UAW President Shawn Fain continues to pocket his \$228,872 annual paycheck.

The refusal of the UAW to mount a real fight against Eaton Aerospace is hardly surprising. Following the 2023 sellout contract at the Detroit Three automakers, the UAW has not lifted a finger to defend thousands of temp worker who were fired by Stellantis, or the jobs of 2,400 workers at Stellantis Warren Truck who were laid off earlier this month. Now, Fain and the UAW bureaucracy are conducting a toothless publicity campaign called “Keep the Promise,” appealing to Stellantis management to reverse the cuts.

The tactics being employed to shut down the strike at Eaton Aerospace mirrors what is taking place at Boeing. Some 33,000 Boeing workers are being strung out on \$250 weekly strike pay while IAM District 751 holds \$79 million in assets and IAM Local 751 President Jon Holden continues to take home his \$225,000 annual salary. The assets of the international union total some \$300 million, enough to pay strikers \$750 for more than 12 weeks.

The UAW bureaucracy is working to suppress strikes for the sake of the war frenzy in Washington. Fain has repeatedly stated that the UAW workers are the “arsenal of democracy,” evoking the war-time mobilization and no-strike policy imposed by both the AFL and the CIO bureaucracies during World War II. Biden, for his part, has called the AFL-CIO his “domestic NATO.”

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team recently visited the picket line at Eaton Aerospace. A seniority worker spoke about the entrance of a federal mediator into negotiations. “I don’t trust them. We don’t have our hopes up on this. We haven’t heard anything, nothing at all.

“Eaton’s bringing in buses that are empty and are for

show. The people that are actually coming in are in vans. The two buses are to try to scare us.

“I see these scabs as a joke, all they’re probably doing is packaging. Eventually you won’t have anything to ship. ... I started at \$12.75, new hires now get \$15.”

He went on to illustrate how workers are in a powerful position to succeed against Eaton. “The jobs in there, you cannot just show something and bring someone in. It’s a precise job; if you over-crimp something or go too close to the shoulder you can destroy the whole part. Some of the jobs are really detailed.

“They have small ball bearings the size of a grain that go into these parts because they swivel. You have to know what you’re doing. When we got certified it wasn’t days, it took months to at least a year before you don’t know it all. A customer might want a different part that’s maybe 30 years old and they don’t make it en masse. We have a print or rights to the part, so we make it. One guy was there 30 years who took vacation; his job came up and he wasn’t here. We couldn’t make the part since he was the only one [with that skill]. The engineers and managers upstairs didn’t know what to do. The line stopped. Eaton gets fined by the customer if parts are late.”

Denouncing the lack of information from the mediator, he continued, “We’ve been in the dark for so long. What’s going on? We don’t hear a lot.”

Speaking to the recent layoffs at Warren Truck he said, “They get rid of you, then hire more workers to pay them less. Some get \$30 then the rest get \$15. Then the engineers ask us how to do the jobs. The company takes that information and goes to Tijuana to pay workers less and people up here are out of a job. No!”

Workers also spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* reporters about the ongoing Boeing strike. One worker said, “For as long as Boeing is on strike, it affects us. As soon as they go into work, they will need us back. It’s a domino effect. We haven’t heard anything on Boeing, nothing from the local. You would think we would be in control of this situation, but we don’t know anything until we find out about it in the news.”

A retiree spoke in support of a jointly coordinated strike with Boeing workers. “Yeah, sure we need to be together,” she said. “I hate Eaton, the easiest place to work but horrible company. Zero ethics but then they try to shove that up your a**. I haven’t heard anything about Boeing; news doesn’t want people to know about them. They have scab people here that are not qualified doing work building parts for these aircraft.”

Responding to the firings at Warren Truck Assembly

she said, “That’s what will happen here, they’ll cut 100 people after this is all settled. I was told when I started I would only last 90 days, but ended up working 15 years. They make prototypes and hold government contracts, that’s what saved some people here. But I’m glad I retired.

“COVID hit and I had to take care of my 95-year-old mother. One person was in the building after a positive COVID test and she walked through my area. I told my boss to give me the 90-day leave of absence. I had the option to take the remaining days for my retirement. I couldn’t be here with my mother at home. They let this person just walk right through the plant and did nothing.

“Three people had to replace me. They called me to tell me I had to come back.”

To avoid a sellout Eaton workers must take the struggle out of the hands of the UAW bureaucracy. The information blackout and isolation of their strike must be broken, trusted rank-and-file workers must be elected from the shop floor and a rank-and-file strike committee formed. In creating these committees workers must raise their own independent demands, including:

- End the information blackout by the UAW bureaucracy. All negotiations must be livestreamed and overseen by rank-and-file workers.

- Increase strike pay to at least \$750 a week for all workers. The \$820 million strike fund, financed by the dues of the rank and file, must be used to sustain workers for this critical battle, not fund the lavish lifestyles of the UAW bureaucrats.

- Restore fully paid pensions and medical benefits for all workers and retirees. No to management-dictated tiers.

It is critical that Eaton Aerospace workers seek to broaden their fight, including reaching out to autoworkers at the Detroit Three. Workers should also look to join forces with their brothers and sisters at Boeing as well as other Eaton workers. Currently, 150 Eaton Aerospace workers in Fareham Hants in England are now striking against low wages. Workers at Monogram Aerospace Fasteners are continuing their strike after voting down two sellout agreements.



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