

Fain's September 11 livestream: UAW president touts collaboration with fascist Trump

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United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain held a livestreamed “town hall meeting” on September 11, which was broadcast from the UAW’s national headquarters in Detroit. In his comments, Fain expressed the concerns of the crisis-ridden union apparatus, which is alarmed by the growing restiveness of workers over ever-greater economic insecurity and the Trump administration’s moves to establish a dictatorship.

Held in the immediate aftermath of the shooting of far-right provocateur Charlie Kirk, which is being used by the Trump administration to criminalize left-wing and socialist opposition, Fain said nothing in his 45-minute address about the existential threat to democracy and the rights of the working class. Instead, he doubled down on his support for Trump’s trade war policies, presenting the fascist president’s actions as a boon for American workers.

After pitching himself to the anger of workers with empty rhetoric about “corporate greed” and social inequality, Fain boasted that the UAW bureaucracy is holding regular meetings with Trump officials on expanding tariffs as part of the administration’s nationalist, fortress-America policy of preparing for global war.

“I want to be clear, we agree with the Trump administration on strategic tariffs,” Fain said, declaring that “free trade has been a disaster.” Rejecting any fight to unite US workers with their class brothers in Mexico, Canada, China and around the world against the transnational corporations, Fain said the UAW was pushing the Trump administration to open up tariff investigations against Mack Trucks for building a new plant in Mexico.

“We’ve been working with the White House to include workers at Deere, Caterpillar and CNH in their tariff regulations, he said, adding that “we expect good things to come out” of the Trump administration’s investigation into the heavy truck and agricultural implement industries. “These products are being sold in the US and they should be made in the US.”

In fact, there is no such thing as an “American-made” vehicle, any more than there is a German, Japanese or other national vehicle. They are the product of an international division of labor, uniting workers into a single process of global production. Trump’s trade war measures are already having a devastating impact on workers in the form of higher inflation and job cuts.

The UAW bureaucracy’s embrace of Trump’s Make America Great Again chauvinism is not a break from, but a continuation and deepening of its policy under Biden. While Biden promoted the unions as his “domestic NATO,” Fain offered the services of the UAW in the transition to a war-time economy, making frequent references to the WWII era military mobilization, the so-called “arsenal of democracy.”

Fain has been supported by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), *Labor Notes* and other pseudo-left organizations who falsely

portrayed him as a “union reformer.” All of these organizations opposed the campaign by Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker who ran as a socialist candidate for UAW president and called for abolition of the UAW apparatus and transfer of power to the workers on the shop floor.

In his livestream event, Fain said nothing about Trump’s open drive toward dictatorship expressed in the deployment of troops to Washington D.C. and threats to deploy troops to Chicago and now Memphis; the provocations against Iran and Venezuela; or the escalating genocide in Gaza. He cynically tried to claim that the UAW’s embrace of Trump’s right-wing, nationalist and militarist agenda did not imply agreement with other aspects of the administration’s policies such as “plucking people off the street” and destroying the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the Department of Education and other agencies.

This caveat, mentioned in passing towards the end of his remarks, amounted to nothing. Like the AFL-CIO and the rest of the labor bureaucracy, Fain has done everything possible to sabotage the growing resistance of workers in basic industries and the universities to Trump’s dictatorial measures and the worsening economic situation. This includes blocking strikes or ending them as soon as possible on management’s terms.

Promotes May Day 2028 strike

Fain sought to cloak his right wing, anti-worker policies with militant sounding rhetoric, denouncing “billionaires” and even talking about “class struggle.” He promoted the May Day 2028 contract expiration as the moment when the union would supposedly lead a great showdown with management. In other words, workers should wait almost three years before doing anything against the plans by Trump and the oligarchy to establish a dictatorship and return workers to conditions of industrial slavery not seen for over a century!

Mass resistance must be organized. But this can only be done through a rebellion against the labor bureaucracy, which functions as a tool of the corporate and political establishment. This means building new organizations, controlled by rank-and-file workers.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is fighting to build rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace, to unite workers against job cuts and capitalist exploitation and prepare a general strike against Trump’s dictatorial moves.

The support of Fain and other sections of the trade union bureaucracy, including Teamsters President Sean O’Brien, has given Trump a critical boost and enabled his fascist agenda. This is acknowledged by Trump

himself, who has several times touted Fain's support. In an event with Labor Secretary Lori Chavez-DeRemer last month, Trump said Fain "didn't know me, didn't like me, and now he likes me. He says, 'Man, I can't believe what Trump has done.'"

In an acknowledgment of the state support for the union bureaucracy, the court-appointed UAW monitor last week threw out on narrow technical grounds a vote by six large UAW locals bringing charges against Fain over retaliation and financial irregularities. The decision means the process must start over.

Against criticism of his support for Trump's policies, Fain resorted to crude pragmatic arguments. "We aren't Democrats, we aren't Republicans. We are trade unionists. Our job is not to play party politics or pick a side we like or make friends with certain politicians."

In fact, the American trade union bureaucracy, including in the UAW, was consolidated in the 1930s and 1940s in a struggle against socialists who called for a break with the Democratic Party and the building of a labor party. Opposing the popular support for this demand, Walter Reuther politically subordinated the working class to the capitalist two-party system, leading to decades of disaster for workers.

Fain opened his comments with references to the September 11 terrorist attacks, which were utilized by the Bush administration and both corporate-controlled parties to suppress internal dissent and expand American imperialism's wars for global conquest. The outcome of this bipartisan attack on democratic rights can now be seen in Trump's move to establish a fascist dictatorship.

As stage-managed as the event was, the mounting hostility among rank-and-file workers was apparent in the comments and questions directed toward Fain. Many expressed anger over the refusal of the UAW to fight layoffs or to oppose mandatory overtime while fellow workers are on the street.

Defends 2023 sellout contract

The UAW president lamely sought to defend the 2023 "record contracts" at the Big Three auto companies, touting the pathetic, below-inflation wage increases, even while conceding the settlements failed to win core demands such as the restoration of pensions, retiree health care, the abolition of tiers and temps and a shorter workweek. He acknowledged that the deals led to the layoff of more than 3,000 workers at Stellantis alone. These issues, he promised, would be top priorities in 2028.

He went on to display a chart showing the long-term trend of rising labor productivity amid stagnating pay and plummeting employment, particularly in the period after 1980. He failed to point out that the severe decline in the social position of the working class laid out in this graph was the direct consequence of decades of concessions imposed by the UAW and other unions, starting with the Chrysler concessions in 1979 and the betrayal of the PATCO air traffic controllers strike in 1981.

Based on its pro-capitalist and nationalist program, the response of the UAW to the deepening crisis of US capitalism in the 1980s was to abandon any defense of workers' interests in the name of unrestrained collaboration with the corporations and the US government and of defending American big business against its foreign competitors. In exchange, the UAW apparatus was rewarded through the funneling of hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars, from the corporations to the UAW treasury via a myriad of joint programs.

Based on the same class logic, today the UAW is taking its integration into the capitalist state structure to a whole new level through collaboration with a fascist administration.

Fain tried to hide the rotten record of the union bureaucracy by reference to a series of supposedly victorious recent contract struggles, in reality—sellouts. He claimed the contract settlement at Daimler Truck last year won "record wage increases" and "cost of living." In fact, the UAW ran roughshod over a 96 percent strike authorization vote to impose a deal with a pay raise that left workers behind inflation, and a supposed cost of living formula, that, like the Big Three, only provides pennies on the dollar for price rises.

He also cited supposed contract gains at Rolls Royce in Indianapolis and General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton, Connecticut. In both cases the UAW ignored overwhelming strike votes and rammed through sellout deals, over intense opposition, that did not meet workers' most basic demands. By blocking strikes at these companies, both critical defense contractors, the UAW reaffirmed its overriding commitment to the war policies of the US government, including the arming and enabling of the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Fain announced that the union was close to a deal to end the strike by more than 600 workers at GE Aerospace, another defense contractor. Over the weekend, the UAW announced a deal but union officials intend to withhold any details until the eve of the September 19 vote.

Fain made no mention of the rising toll of workplace deaths in the auto factories, including the April 7 death of Stellantis skilled trades worker Ronald Adams Sr. at the Dundee Engine plant in Southeast Michigan, nor the death of Stellantis Toledo Jeep worker Antonio Gaston in August of last year. In both cases, the UAW worked hand in glove with management to cover up the unsafe conditions in the plants that contributed to the deaths of these workers.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees broke through the veil of secrecy around the death of Adams through the holding of a Workers Inquiry on July 27 in Detroit that took testimony from safety experts and workers. Among other facts that emerged: the lockout/tagout protections were routinely bypassed using "cheater keys" distributed by management with the undoubted connivance of the UAW.

The line-up by the Fain administration and the UAW apparatus behind the fascistic Trump administration is all of one piece with this unending record of sellouts. The only basis for the defense of even the most basic rights of the working class is the rejection of the nationalist and pro-capitalist program of the UAW apparatus and the adoption of an international strategy based on the global unification of the working class.

Workers should draw the necessary conclusions from this record and join the fight of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to build a movement of workers on the shop floor independent of the pro-corporate UAW apparatus.



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