

In response to Volkswagen’s “final offer” UAW schedules strike vote at Chattanooga plant

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Work at VW Chattanooga? Fill out the form at the end of the article to get in touch about forming a rank-and-file committee or to share your thoughts about the contract fight. Your identity will be kept confidential.

The United Auto Workers announced Thursday that it will hold a strike authorization vote on October 28 and 29 for over 4,000 workers at the Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Workers voted to join the UAW in April 2024 but are still without a first contract. No strike deadline has been set.

A company “final offer,” a contract spanning four years, has been posted online. Management has set an October 31 deadline for the UAW to accept the offer or it will withdraw a proposed \$1,500 signing bonus.

The Chattanooga facility is the only VW assembly plant in the United States, and the first of the foreign transplant auto factories in the US, to be unionized. The Chattanooga facility builds the ID.4 electric SUV, Atlas and Atlas Cross Sport models. Prior attempts by the UAW to secure recognition in 2014 and 2019 failed.

By voting 3-1 for union recognition, workers showed their determination to fight for improved pay and conditions, but the UAW has done nothing to meet those expectations.

During the whole protracted negotiation process, the UAW bureaucracy has made no effort to bring matters to a head, being content to string talks along while it collects dues. It has not even advanced a list of demands, as it did in the 2023 Detroit Big Three contract negotiations. The current strike vote has been provoked largely by the actions of management, not by any hardening of the stance of the union.

In March, VW announced a shift reduction and the furlough of 160 workers due to declining demand for the electric ID.4 electric SUV and higher costs, evoking no response from the union.

Meanwhile, the UAW has made no attempt to link the fight of Volkswagen workers with autoworkers across the

United States, let alone with VW workers in Europe, who are facing a massive assault on jobs and conditions. In Germany alone, VW is planning to cut one-third of its workforce, 35,000 jobs, by 2030.

Instead, UAW President Shawn Fain has lined up behind the trade war policies of the fascist Trump, presenting this right-wing demagogue as a defender of workers’ rights and advising workers to look to the anti-worker National Labor Relations Board, stacked with far-right Trump appointees.

Recently, UAW President Shawn Fain hailed the announcement by Stellantis that it would shift production of the Jeep Compass from its factory in Brampton, Ontario to Belvidere, Illinois, displacing 3,000 Canadian autoworkers. This nationalist policy plays into the hands of the transnational auto companies, allowing them to pit American workers against their working class brothers in other countries in a fratricidal race to the bottom.

VW workers cannot afford to leave the contract fight in the hands of the UAW apparatus. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees call on VW workers to organize rank-and-file committees to spearhead the fight for a decent contract. These committees, democratically run by workers themselves, should lay out demands based on what workers actually need and mobilize support from throughout the working class, including brother VW workers globally.

The lack of any serious intent by the UAW apparatus to win a decent contract is revealed by its response to management’s “final offer.”

The UAW has submitted a “counteroffer,” saying it will call off the strike vote and recommend ratification if management accepts the proposed deal. The UAW pointed to four areas where it said VW’s proposal falls short, including language against layoffs and plant closings, “affordable, high-quality healthcare” matching the standard at the Detroit automakers, an improved cost-of-living allowance and language that “ensures members can use their

earned PTO, are protected from punitive drug testing, and have adequate breaks to recover from the physical demands of the job.”

Very little further information about the UAW’s “counteroffer” has been made public. The UAW is not even demanding that VW align the contract expiration with the May 1, 2028 expiration for the Detroit automakers, the date of the much hyped “general strike” that UAW President Shawn Fain is constantly promoting.

Significantly, the UAW has said nothing about VW’s miserable wage proposal of 20 percent over four years, leaving workers significantly below the current, inadequate, wage levels of UAW-represented autoworkers at the Detroit-based car companies. The company “final offer” includes a more than four-year wage progression that starts at \$23.41 per hour and tops out in 2030 at \$39.41. By comparison, the current wage progression at Stellantis is three years. As of September 2025, the starting pay was \$26.19, topping out in 2027 at \$40.46.

Perhaps more egregious, the UAW is silent on the failure of VW to propose any language protecting temporary workers, essentially giving management a free hand to abuse this highly exploited section of the workforce. The “final offer” references document SPRC-002 on temporary part time workers, but no specific language is posted.

While the number of temporary workers at VW Chattanooga and their pay levels does not appear to be publicly available, it is well known that all the foreign transplant auto companies in the US use large numbers of temporary and contract workers to keep costs low. According to a 2021 report in the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, VW was hiring 1,000 temp workers through a staffing agency at pay rates starting as low as \$15.50 per hour for forklift drivers.

During the 2023 Big Three contract negotiations, the UAW claimed it would demand sharp limits on the use of temporary workers and convert thousands to full-time status upon contract ratification. Instead, workers soon discovered this was a lie, with thousands of temp workers fired following the contract signing.

For its part, VW has included, in some cases it appears almost verbatim, the bulk of the corporatist language contained in the 2023 Big Three agreements, comprising a substantial portion of its ponderous 400-page contract document. This includes the UAW-VW Joint Continuous Improvement Committee, tasked with cutting costs and driving up production, the National Joint Training and Development Program, UAW-VW Quality Program.

Sixty pages alone of the proposed contract detail the duties of the Joint Health and Safety Committee. The purpose of all these committees is to tie the union at the hip to management

and prevent any real independent oversight and control by workers over conditions. At the same time, these committees provide cushy jobs for union officials and their cronies. During the years-long federal investigation into UAW corruption, that sent more than a dozen UAW top leaders to prison, it came out that the joint training centers were a conduit for illegal management bribes to UAW officials.

This is particularly the case of the joint UAW-management health and safety committees. In no case has management been held truly to account for the deaths of autoworkers over the past decades.

During the Workers Inquiry into the death of Stellantis Dundee Engine worker Ronald Adams Sr., held this past July in Detroit and organized by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, testimony exposed the role of the UAW in working with management to cover up the circumstances of Adams’ death and prevent any real investigation. This included the attempted intimidation of co-workers of Ronald Adams Sr. to try to keep them silent. Despite this, many workers came forward to expose the conditions that contributed to the tragedy.

Many workers on social media expressed frustration with the long, drawn-out contract negotiations and lack of transparency by the UAW. The UAW Volkswagen Local 42 Facebook page has not been updated since May.

A rally called by the UAW on Thursday to announce the strike authorization vote drew sparse attendance. One worker posted on Facebook, “If the UAW can’t muster any more of the workforce to protest yesterday than that small group they aren’t really getting the support they are looking for. Less than 100 out of 4500 employees, plus I’m betting some of that group are not even employed by Volkswagen.”

Chattanooga VW workers must reject the nationalist, pro-corporate policies of the UAW apparatus. Workers must instead organize rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracy. These committees must map out a strategy aimed at unifying autoworkers in the US, Canada, Mexico and globally in a common fight to defend jobs and working conditions.



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