

UAW convention opens in Detroit amid rebellion by auto parts workers

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The United Auto Workers 39th Constitutional Convention opened in Detroit Monday with the usual vacuous and self-congratulatory speeches by top union officials and Democratic Party politicians, including UAW President Shawn Fain, AFL-CIO President Liz Schuler and Detroit Democratic Mayor Mary Sheffield.

Schuler called for a mass mobilization by the UAW, not to fight for the interests of workers but to elect Democrats in the midterm elections. She called for the mobilization of 50,000 trained campaign workers. The convention hall, top heavy with well-paid union officials, provided a cheering section for this bankrupt perspective.

UAW officials are shamelessly seeking to use the workers at American Axle in Three Rivers, Michigan as PR props as part of the re-election campaign of UAW President Shawn Fain. On the eve of the convention, the UAW rammed through a sellout deal that raised top pay to \$30 an hour by 2030, far less than workers made in real terms prior to the 50 percent pay cut imposed in the 2008 concessions contract. They absurdly presented the new deal as a “record contract.”

The convention was held under conditions of the drive to establish a fascistic dictatorship in the United States by the Trump administration and the expanding global war, including the war on Iran, which has triggered a surge in the cost of food, fuel and other basic necessities.

There was not even a fleeting reference from the convention podium to the shredding of the Constitution by the Trump administration, war or the mass arrests and deportations of immigrants, including UAW members.

Fain in his President’s Report made liberal use of militant-sounding rhetoric supplied by his advisers in

groups like Labor Notes and the Democratic Socialists of America, but he made no mention of Trump by name or the critical issues facing the working class. This is not surprising, since Fain is in a de facto alliance with Trump over his tariffs, the spearhead of his fascistic America First policy directed at the overseas rivals of US capitalism, in the first place China.

Fain referenced vast wealth inequality, epitomized by Elon Musk becoming the world’s first trillionaire. But he used this to promote the “Stand Up Strike” and the supposedly historic 2023 Big Three contract, which was defended with outright lies about the supposed gains the UAW achieved for workers.

Inflation has long ago eaten up the 25 percent wage increase that did not even make up for the previous surge in prices during the pandemic, let alone for past concessions. The touted cost-of-living adjustment only provided pennies on the dollar. The claim that the UAW eliminated tiers was a lie, as workers still face a three-year wage progression.

Instead of job security, the UAW delivered a wave of mass layoffs and firings, including the sacking of thousands of temporary part-time workers, or Supplementals, who had been falsely promised full-time jobs upon contract ratification. Thousands of workers remain on indefinite layoff, including second shift workers at Warren Truck north of Detroit. Some 1,200 General Motors workers were laid off in January at the flagship EV plant Factory Zero in Detroit, and Ford’s Rouge Electric Vehicle Center has been idled.

In contrast to Fain’s absurd picture of a thankful membership, the UAW apparatus is facing a rebellion by auto parts workers, who have decisively voted down sellout contracts that the union apparatus tried ram down their throats. At Nexteer in Saginaw, Michigan, the 1,700 workers have rejected three contracts that

would leave them making poverty wages. A majority of workers at Dana factories have voted down sellout deals in the last week, including at the Warren, Michigan facility and the Dana Driveline factory in Toledo, where workers turned in a 95 percent “no.”

A delegate from Local 9025 at the Dana plant in Paris, Tennessee told the *World Socialist Web Site* that workers at his factory voted by 288-1 to reject a UAW-backed offer by management that would have only raised top wages to a starvation level \$24.50, while leaving starting pay at \$19 an hour. Noting that Elon Musk just became a trillionaire, he said, “Something has got to give for the working class. \$19 an hour is not going to make it. I have been in there 32 years working for nickels. We can’t make it on that. We are in there breaking out backs.”

He reported that workers were prepared to strike but never got authorization from the UAW International. “Picket signs were supposed to be delivered one week before, but they never showed up. No one even gave me an answer as to why. We wanted to strike and show the company we mean it; you can’t pay bills on \$19 an hour.”

A delegate from Local 12 at the Stellantis Toledo Jeep complex noted that despite the “historic” 2023 contract, “You can see how inflation is hitting people. A lot have taken two jobs. Now it takes two spouses on full-time jobs in a household to cover everything.”

A retired UAW official told this reporter that the UAW had become even less democratic under the Fain administration. He noted that while over the recent period the membership of the UAW had remained static, the number of paid staff Solidarity House had increased dramatically, as much as 34 percent.

In the face of discontent, the convention expressed a further tightening of the bureaucratic control by the corporatist UAW apparatus. This was expressed in the fact that no agenda for the convention was presented to delegates, and business proceedings were completing closed to the media, unlike in 2022 when a livestream feed was available. As it has for the past two decades, the UAW denied the WSWS press credentials and barred its reporter from the official press room.

UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman set up at campaign table at the convention and distributed his campaign flyer calling for delegates to nominate him for UAW president. Among those campaigning for

Will was a worker victimized by Dana for exposing deadly conditions and the collusion of local union official at a plant in Warren, Michigan. Another worker from the Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan, who ran as part of Lehman’s Insurgent Slate, also campaigned with Will.

The Lehman campaign posted a video on social media of statements from workers and retirees from Stellantis, General Motors, Nexteer and the academic sector calling on delegates to nominate him.

In his campaign statements Lehman has called for the abolition of the UAW apparatus and the restoration of power to workers on the shop floor, the construction of a network of rank-and-file committees. The committees would become bases of rank-and-file power in the workplace fighting for workers’ control over line speed, safety, hiring and production and the power to halt production if necessary to save lives. Lehman has also issued statements opposing Trump’s criminal war against Iran, Fain’s support for Trump’s tariffs and the fight for the international unity of the working class.



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