

“We need to call everyone out,” say GM CCA workers on picket lines in Burton, Michigan

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United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain is holding a Facebook Live event Friday at 10 am, where UAW officials have said Fain will call out more facilities on strike “if there is not substantial progress in ongoing contract negotiations” with GM, Ford and Stellantis. If a decision is made to expand the strike, workers will be called out at noon.

The UAW bureaucracy is anxious to announce a deal as soon as possible, but it is aware that it confronts a militant rank and file, unwilling to accept a deal that betrays their central demands. This includes inflation-busting wage increases, restoration of cost-of-living protections and other concessions given up by the UAW in 2009, along with abolition of the hated two-tier wage and benefit system.

Fain may call out additional workers but he will continue to keep the vast majority of workers in the plants, producing vehicles and profits for the companies. The “Stand Up strike policy,” which at this point has involved around 18,000 out of the 146,000 UAW members at the Big Three is aimed at dividing workers and wearing down their resistance, while the UAW bureaucracy conspires with the companies and the Biden administration to impose a sellout deal.

According to the *Detroit News*, “GM and UAW negotiators met for a bargaining session Wednesday afternoon. Talks between the UAW and all three companies have been ‘very active’ in the last day or two, according to a source familiar with the situation who was not authorized to comment publicly. The UAW submitted a counteroffer to Stellantis on Thursday, according to the union.”

The UAW has already backtracked from its original list of “members demands.” During his last contract update on September 22, Fain noticeably left out any mention of the companies’ responses to the union’s proposal for a 40 percent wage increase over the life of the four-year contract, a 32-hour work week, or reinstating pensions and retiree health care benefits.

A report in Bloomberg Thursday, citing internal sources, said

UAW officials would be willing to accept a 30 percent pay raise to reach a deal. “That’s the level—which is lower than the around 40% hike it initially proposed to Ford Motor Co., General Motors Co. and Stellantis NV—that the union believes will allow it to satisfy existing members and organize non-union plants.”

The straight-base pay increase would actually be lower, since the 30 percent figure would include “a cost-of-living allowance, or COLA, and a general wage increase, according to the people, who asked not to be named because the talks are private,” Bloomberg reported.

Automaker stocks rose on the news, led by 2.5 percent gains in GM and Stellantis’ US shares, Bloomberg reported, adding, “GM and Ford have seen steep declines since July amid uncertainty about the negotiations. Stellantis is the outlier, up 36% so far this year.”

On Thursday, Fain also released a video condemning attacks and threats on striking workers and blamed GM and Stellantis for “enabling” violence. Both companies have strongly pushed back on the claims. This included a house-keeping contractor at GM’s Flint Processing Center in Swartz Creek, near Flint, who drove out of the facility on Tuesday and struck five people on the picket line before fleeing the scene. Fain said two workers were taken to the hospital.

Fain reported that non-union truck drivers have also pulled guns on strikers in Ontario, California and denounced GM and Stellantis for “hiring violent scabs to try to break our strike.”

The escalation of such attacks is a real danger that must be opposed by all workers. But the reality is, the UAW bureaucracy’s decision to isolate striking workers by keeping 128,000 of its members working has left pickets vulnerable to such attacks. At the same time, management within the non-striking plants is waging a campaign of terror against workers, issuing unjust suspensions and firings, increasing line speeds and reducing hours of temporary workers who are already living in poverty.

This only underscores the need for rank-and-file workers to call for the convening of emergency membership meetings at every local union to discuss and vote for an all-out strike immediately.

On the picket lines at General Motors parts distribution center in Burton, Michigan

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team visited the picket line at the General Motors parts distribution center in Burton, Michigan, outside of Flint, Thursday. The Burton Customer Care and Aftersales (CCA) facility is one of 38 GM and Stellantis parts distribution centers Fain called out on September 22.

The facility in Burton is the largest CCA at GM, employing over 1,000 workers. It supplies auto parts retailers as well as dealerships across the US, packaging over 700,000 parts each day when in full operation. Since the start of the strike, GM has attempted to maintain partial operation using supervisory personnel. Earlier in the year, GM announced a \$100 million upgrade to the facility.

The facility is only a few miles from the Swartz Creek facility where a driver struck several picketers earlier in the week. Workers expressed their concern and anger over the incident but said they had been given very little information about it.

WSWS reporters found CCA workers in a militant and determined mood. Workers were aware of the recent high profile visit of President Biden to a UAW picket line outside of Detroit earlier in the week as well as a rally held by Donald Trump in the Detroit suburbs. Some workers expressed the hope that the publicity of the presidential visit might aid workers, but most expressed distaste for Biden as well as Trump.

When asked what he thought about the visit by President Biden one worker said, "He's the first president going to a picket line that I have heard of." He said he was hopeful that something might come of it but admitted, "I don't like Biden whatsoever, same with Trump."

WSWS reporters pointed out that as vice president under Obama, Biden helped ram through massive concessions on the backs of autoworkers as part of the restructuring of the auto industry in 2009.

The worker remarked, "We lost pensions, we lost pay, they started the tiers, everything they took away then is what we are trying to get back now."

"We get paid less than all the other factories. In this building we have two tiers. Anyone who got hired before February of 2015 get \$3-5 less than the production plants, but anyone hired after that, they max out at \$25 an hour. If he is doing the same job right next to me, he gets, \$25 and I get \$35. That's not fair. We are trying to fix that. He deserves the same money as I do because he is doing the same thing."

"Mary Barra got a 40 percent raise and we got 6 percent. We are doing all the work. It takes us eight years to get to top pay. When she gets her raise, she gets her full raise.

"This is the largest CCA in the world for GM. We have 1,200-1,500 employees. The parts come in one door in a box of

10,000 and they go out another individually wrapped. They go to all the auto stores, Auto Zone. They are losing all the maintenance parts."

The WSWS reporters explained that Will Lehman, a rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker had run for UAW president on a program calling for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy and the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor. "I wasn't aware of that. The UAW didn't put a lot out there. We got a letter in the mail to vote. It wasn't advertised very much.

"I hope he gets his name back on the ballot and I hope he gets elected."

A 16-year veteran worker said, "People may complain that if we get a raise the cost of vehicles will go up; but the cost of vehicles has been going up, but our pay rate stays the same."

Chris, another worker, said, "We can't afford the cars and trucks that GM builds. A GMC truck sells for \$100,000."

The veteran worker added, "I was at Delphi two years. We were told we were there just to close the plant down. Then they hired us all, groups at a time. We started at Delphi at \$14.43 an hour, then we moved up to \$18. Then when we went to GM, we went back down to \$14.43 an hour and worked our way back to \$18."

A number of workers expressed the hope that the "stand-up" strike, which has only mobilized a small fraction of workers at the Detroit auto companies, would be sufficient to win. A number said they hoped and expected that UAW President Shawn Fain would announce a further expansion of the strike on Friday.

Several expressed surprise to learn the UAW had \$825 million stashed away in the strike fund. One worker admitted being caught off guard by the strategy employed by Fain of keeping most members working, producing profits for the companies. "It's little by little. When we saw the first three, we thought, "what is that going to do?"

Chris said, "They are not ready to budge. They have got to lose enough money to where they are hurting, but right now they are still building cars and trucks. I agree, we need to call everyone out. The only time they will listen is when everyone comes out."

Another young worker said, "It shouldn't take us 116 years to make what Mary Barra makes in one year, a person who doesn't put one thing together. We start here at \$16.67. We put our sweat in here, they should give us what we are worth. They can definitely afford to give us what we are asking for."

Asked what he thought about a strike by all autoworkers he said, "If that's what it takes, that's what we will have to do."



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