

UAW strikes Michigan Stellantis and Texas GM plants amid signs union is close to announcing sellout deal

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The United Auto Workers called out 6,800 workers at Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly (SHAP) on strike Monday, only the second Stellantis assembly plant called out since the launch of the phony “stand-up strike” by UAW President Shawn Fain last month and the first in the Detroit metro area.

On Tuesday morning, the UAW bureaucracy called out another 5,000 workers at GM’s Arlington, Texas plant after GM announced better than expected third-quarter profits of \$3.06 billion. The company said UAW strikes had only cost it \$200 million in the third quarter, or 0.45 percent of its \$44.13 billion in third-quarter revenues.

By calling out the workers at SHAP and Arlington, Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy are trying to maintain credibility before announcing a sellout deal, which, they know, will encounter massive opposition from the rank and file. Such a deal, with GM or all three automakers, could come in the next few days. Rank-and-file autoworkers must prepare now to defeat it and organize an all-out strike.

With anger reaching a boiling point over the refusal of UAW to call an industry-wide strike, Fain ordered the first walkout at a plant that produces one of the Big Three’s top-selling vehicles—the Ram 1500 pickup truck. But the strike is not expected to have an immediate impact on Stellantis sales, since the company, with the collusion of the UAW, built up stockpile of Ram 1500s before the strike. According to press reports, the company has a 114-day supply of the highly profitable vehicle.

Great press fanfare accompanied the walkout at SHAP, with the UAW public relations department working overtime. Fain posed and greeted workers at SHAP in person and helped pass out picket signs. Along with UAW Secretary Treasurer Margaret Mock, Fain led a march outside the plant. The UAW bureaucracy treated the workers, who were not even notified until shortly before the strike, as extras in these photo-ops.

The phony stand-up strike, now nearing completion of its sixth week, has expanded to only 45,000 of the 146,000 UAW members at GM, Ford and Stellantis—or less than one-third (31 percent) of the Detroit Three UAW workforce. The strike so far has hardly dented corporate revenue and profits, with Ford and General Motors recording \$500 million losses, or 0.6 percent of the companies’ combined second-quarter revenue.

In announcing the walkout, Fain declared, “Currently, Stellantis

has the worst proposal on the table regarding wage progression, temporary worker pay and conversion to full-time, cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), and more.” However, he also indicated the UAW was close to an agreement with GM, with only “some tweaks left to make.” GM is only offering a total 23 percent wage increase over four years, barely the cost of the last four years’ inflation. The GM proposal maintains a three-year wage progression, fails to restore pensions, does not promise conversion of all temps and provides a worse than pathetic one-time \$1,000 bonus for retirees.

Most critically, as far as the UAW apparatus is concerned, GM is proposing to bring its Ultium LLC battery plants under the terms of the national contract agreement but under separate terms to provide for “flexible” wage rates based on “output, government subsidies and competitor costs.” In other words, this will be a low-wage operation, with workers compelled to pay dues to the UAW apparatus.

Everything points to an early attempt by Fain to announce a settlement and seek ratification. Merrick Masters, a labor studies professor at Wayne State University, told the *Detroit Free Press* with the walkout at SHAP, “The UAW is obviously reacting to the reality of the need to bring the strike actions to successful closure.”

The stage is being set for Fain to announce a “capitulation” by Stellantis to the sellout framework set by GM and launch a propaganda blitz aided by the corporate media and the Democratic Socialists of America and other pseudo-left groups to sell the contract to members.

Picketing SHAP workers told the *World Socialist Web Site* they were totally surprised by the strike announcement. Despite that, and with questions about the effectiveness of the stand-up strike, workers expressed determination to win substantial gains after decades of concessions and sacrifice.

A WSWs reporting team distributed copies of the statement by the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee calling for an all-out strike against the Detroit Big Three and the defense of temp workers, who are facing reduced hours or zero hours of work.

One worker said, “Not everyone understands the stand-up strike.” She added, “We are determined to win and just as determined as Stellantis was to take away things at the start.”

Another worker said, “We need back the benefits we lost in

bankruptcy,” referring to pensions, cost of living and retiree health benefits among other gains surrendered by the UAW along with the division of the workforce into tiers. Another worker said, “We are out here for what we deserve. Right now, all we are doing is making the rich, richer. We worked through COVID, faced stress, saw people get sick and die. I am thankful I am still standing; our bodies go through so much stress.”

The same day that the UAW announced the walkout at SHAP, the union announced that it had reached a last-minute tentative agreement with General Dynamics to prevent a strike by 1,100 workers against the defense contractor. According to information released by the UAW, the four-year agreement provides a miserable 14 percent pay increase, a limited cost-of-living adjustment and maintains a pay progression—in other words, tiers. UAW members at plants in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania had previously voted by 97 percent to strike.

Fain and the UAW bureaucracy have the closest relationship with the Biden administration, which is determined to prevent a strike by workers at General Dynamics, who manufacture and refurbish A-1 Abrams tanks and other critical weaponry needed for the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. The company has made over \$22 billion in profits over the last three years and stands to make even more as Biden increases military spending for Ukraine, Israel and the growing confrontation with China.

Two weeks ago 4,000 workers at Mack Trucks in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Florida voted down a sellout contract endorsed by Fain by a three-to-one margin and launched a strike. The five-year proposal included a 19 percent wage increase and increased the work day from 8 to 8.5 hours with no overtime pay. The Mack Trucks Rank-and-File Committee has issued an open letter to Fain, demanding an all-out strike at the Big Three to break the resistance of both the auto and truck manufacturing companies.

When told about the General Dynamics deal, SHAP workers responded derisively. The SHAP worker with 24 years said, “Fourteen percent is nothing.” Another worker said, “Fourteen percent is not a lot of money, nor is 19 percent. That’s a slap in the face.”

A veteran worker said, “Cost of living is a big thing. I drive 100 miles a day to work. Like a lot of workers, I worked at two or three different plants. I started out a Detroit Axle, went to Warren Truck and came over here because it is closer to home. You are spending hundreds of dollars a week on gas, and then you don’t have cost of living. The bills don’t get less.”

He added, “They abuse the temps. It has gotten out of hand. They pay us \$30 an hour and pay them \$15. We build a lot of trucks. It is not gravy. There are a lot of messed up jobs. It’s like any profession. There is a price to pay. Our price to pay is our bodies.

“You earn your respect by coming to work every day. I have worked here 24 years and was only late one time to work because a head gasket blew.

“I was in the army. In the military, you get abused and used like everywhere else. You go to the VA and try to get benefits, and they give you the runaround. You quit going, you just give up with the all the BS you go through. That’s what they want; run you in circles until you say ‘forget it.’”

Asked what he thought about the bombing of Gaza, he observed, “It’s awful. With the wars, as they say ‘the rich man goes to college; the poor man goes to war.’ That’s the way it is.”

Another worker said he was concerned that the introduction of electric vehicle technology would lead to a jobs bloodbath. “Over the last 20 years we have lost 45-50 plants. Once they transition to EVs, they will cut jobs.” The WSWS explained that the UAW was prepared to agree to a deal that would provide for lower wages for battery plants workers. “Battery workers need the same wages and benefits,” he said. He also agreed with the call for a 32-hour workweek.

Asked about the bombing of Gaza by Israel, he said, “It is unnecessary.” He said he was unhappy “our tax dollars” were backing the Israeli onslaught. “Imagine what we could do with \$100 billion,” he said referring to President Biden’s request for additional military funding for the Israeli war against the Palestinians and Ukraine. “What if they had taken the money they gave to the banks in 2008 and instead given \$1 million to every US family?”

Rank-and-file workers must prepare now to oppose the impending sellout that the Fain bureaucracy is preparing. This requires expanding the network of rank-and-file committees into every factory to enforce the non-negotiable demands of workers for inflation-busting wage increases, the restoration of COLA and company paid pensions and retiree health care for all workers, the elimination of all tiers, the immediate conversion of all current and future temps and large pension increases for retired workers. The resistance of the employers to these demands can only be broken by mobilizing workers in an industry-wide strike.

Join the next online meeting of the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network to discuss uniting workers for an all-out strike across the auto industry. Register here to attend.

Sign up for text message updates on the Detroit Big Three contract fight by texting AUTO to (866) 847-1086. To discuss joining a rank-and-file committee or to share your thoughts, fill out the form below.



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