

As UC strike expands, signs of crisis in UAW apparatus

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On Tuesday, June 4, at 7 p.m. Eastern/4 p.m. Pacific, the WSWs and International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are holding an online public meeting, “From Wayne State to University of California—industrial workers must oppose protest crackdowns.” Register for the meeting here.

In a sign of deep crisis within the union apparatus, UAW President Shawn Fain removed Vice President Rich Boyer as head of the union’s Stellantis department last week. Fain said he will be personally assuming oversight of Stellantis.

In a letter posted on Facebook Fain acknowledged that there was simmering rank-and-file anger over recent job cuts at Stellantis, including the firing of thousands of part-time or supplemental workers, and that this was behind the reshuffling of positions at the top of the UAW bureaucracy.

In an unusually candid admission, Fain declared, “Over the past several months, since we settled our 2023 contract, we have heard our Stellantis members loud and clear: this company is running roughshod over our agreement and over our membership.”

Fain claims the 2023 contract was a “historic” win. He wrote: “We have ended the permanent abuse of temporary workers; they want to turn that into mass layoffs. We have won historic product commitments; they want to undermine that with cuts elsewhere. That is unacceptable, and it is our union’s duty to fight back as a united membership and leadership.”

This is a bald-faced lie. In fact, the 2023 auto agreement was a sellout that abandoned all of workers’ key demands and imposed a below-inflation pay raise. The false claim that the deal ended the abuse of temp workers, who were promised full-time jobs upon ratification, was quickly exposed when after ratification workers faced mass firings. Layoffs hit the Mack Assembly Plant in Detroit, which lost a full shift, and also the Toledo Jeep complex. Right after the layoffs, workers at the Jeep plant were forced onto a brutal mandatory 7-day, 10-hour schedule.

After the firing of more than 2,300 supplemental employees, the company is reportedly hiring new SEs to replace the ones fired with the complicity of the UAW, according to workers who have spoken to the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*.

Fain pretends that it is a matter of top officials failing to “enforce” the contract. He knows full well, however, that the contract he and Boyer signed gave Stellantis the green light to fire thousands of temps and accelerate its attack on full-time workers. As for the “new UAW” not “leaving workers in the dark,” Fain, Boyer & Co. deliberately concealed from the membership the fact

that they agreed that the company would only convert only 1,957 out of the company’s 5,219 SEs—and fire the rest.

In a further betrayal, the UAW has said nothing about Stellantis’ layoff of 130 workers at its Belvidere, Illinois parts distribution facility. As part of the 2023 contract, the UAW claimed it had gotten a commitment from Stellantis to reopen the shuttered Belvidere Assembly plant as well as construct a new battery plant and parts distribution center.

Fain concludes his letter with a vague promise of “pushback,” in the future, while saying zero about what action the UAW will take over the attacks that have already taken place. “Over the next few months, you can look forward to more pushback on the company when they violate the contract, and more communication from your International UAW leadership about the status of various core issues at Stellantis.”

This is a falling out among thieves. Boyer is no doubt a company stooge. But Fain is using him as a fall guy to cover up the fact that the whole UAW bureaucracy agreed to this pro-company contract.

Fain’s action against Boyer follows a similar action against Margaret Mock, UAW secretary-treasurer, who was relieved of a number of her duties amidst vague claims of financial improprieties. Both Boyer, former skilled trades committeeman at Stellantis Warren Truck, and Mock were elected along with Fain in the tainted 2022 election as part of the Members United slate, which ran with the endorsement of the Democratic Socialists of America and other pseudo-left groups.

That election saw massive voter suppression by the UAW apparatus, directed in the first place against socialist rank-and-file autoworker Will Lehman from Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania. Although 90 percent of the membership was excluded from the election, Lehman won nearly 5,000 votes for his call to abolish the bureaucracy and transfer power to the workers on the shop floor.

The leadership reshuffle takes place as the UAW apparatus becomes daily more discredited. Fain faces a growing rebellion among UAW academic workers in California, who are engaged in a political strike against the police suppression of campus protests against the US-backed genocide in Gaza. The UAW apparatus, which has tried to limit and isolate the strike, despite an overwhelming strike vote by 50,000 UC workers, faces a growing rebellion from the ranks.

With open threats of wildcat strikes, the UAW bureaucracy has been forced to expand the strike to UC Santa Barbara, UC San

Diego and UC Irvine. This follows the brutal police attack Friday on the student protest encampment at UC Santa Cruz and the shutdown of the student encampment at Wayne State University in Detroit.

Last month, the UAW's attempt to unionize autoworkers in the South met a major setback when workers at the Mercedes Benz plant in Vance, Alabama voted by 56-44 percent against the UAW, with a 90 percent turnout.

The UAW bureaucracy is doing everything it can to isolate the UC strike by keeping Detroit auto plants in the dark about the academic workers' struggle. When informed about the strike by the WSWS, workers have expressed support and sympathy for strike action by industrial workers to defend the students and oppose the war.

A worker at Warren Truck told the WSWS, "If the cops can start arresting these kids for protesting, even though that's their basic right, they'll start to do it to the workers too, you already know that."

Another worker said, "We should all be on strike right now, but we aren't because Fain lied to get into office. He is a bullshitter and strung us all along. It doesn't matter if it's Stellantis or not, we're all in the UAW so we should all be out on strike"

A supporter of the Ford Rouge Workers Rank-and-File committee denounced the shutdown of the Wayne State encampment by police. "All they were asking for is that the university stop doing business with the Israeli government. They are protesting the genocide. What is wrong with that?" The Biden administration, he added, "is sending planes, tanks, money and everything to support the Israeli government."

The UAW bureaucracy has emerged as a key supporter of the Biden administration under conditions of growing opposition among workers and young people to its program of war and austerity. Fain has attempted to posture on the one hand as a supporter of a ceasefire in Gaza while at the same time fully endorsing "Genocide Joe" and suppressing anti-genocide protests at UAW-sponsored events.

In return for the UAW's political support, the Biden administration is integrating the UAW apparatus into its plans to secure the "home front" in its expanding wars targeting Russia and China. On Friday, Biden appointed Fain to the President's Export Council, an advisory board on trade, where he will join a host of corporate officers such as Fedex President and CEO Raj Subramaniam and Ford Chief Financial Officer John Lawler in promoting trade war against US overseas rivals. The appointment of Fain follows Biden's recent slapping of huge tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles and threats of direct military intervention in Ukraine targeting Russia.

At UAW meetings and rallies Fain has taken to wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the logo of a World War II B-24 bomber and the slogan, "arsenal of democracy," a reference to the US military-industrial complex in the Second World War.

A full-time Mack Avenue Assembly worker who narrowly avoided the first round of layoffs told the WSWS that anger at the entire UAW apparatus over continuing job cuts and speedup is continuing to boil.

"I heard the whole plant may be going down to one shift," she

said, citing rumors that have been circulating that have been neither confirmed nor denied by the UAW.

"They have brought back TPTs, [temporary part time or Supplementals]. I was working side-by-side with full-time people who were laid off, and then the next week I am working with TPTs. It's not that I don't want the TPTs to work," she said, noting that full-time workers make \$35 an hour while supplementals earn at least \$10 an hour less, and with fewer benefits.

She said the UAW had not informed her or other workers at Mack about the strike by UC academic workers. "We were foolish to let them make us think they were going to let us make \$35 and nothing was going to happen. Not that we don't need it. But they are not going to just be paying people \$35. They are slimming down. The supervisors are leaving. They say it is a sinking ship. They are eliminating jobs."

She said workers were ready to fight: "We should be protesting when they do that. We have to stop that instead of just letting them do it. I heard that some plants struck, stood on the blue line (walked away from the assembly line and stopped production), to protest that they laid off full-timers and brought in TPTs, and they got them hired back."

The Ford worker added, "Everybody should be working, or we should still be on strike," he said. "They are wasting too much of our money on war." Referencing recent layoffs at the Rouge complex, he said, "The UAW is not going to help us. The company asked us if we would agree to take six months off. I did not agree with that. The union reps were lying all the way. The UAW knew the layoffs were coming, and they did nothing."

Everything, from the fight against police repression and war, to the defense of jobs and living standards, depends on the initiative of rank-and-file workers themselves. This means expanding the Network of Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committees, which works under the leadership of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

For more information on building rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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