

On defensive from mass anger, UAW President Fain threatens strike action “if necessary” against Stellantis

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On Sunday, September 22, at 2:00 p.m. Pacific, 5:00 p.m. Eastern, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee is holding an online meeting to mobilize the broadest support in the working class for the 33,000 striking Boeing machinists. Register for the event by clicking here.

In an online speech Tuesday evening, United Auto Workers (UAW) President Shawn Fain said the union is “preparing to take action at Stellantis” in response to the thousands of job cuts announced by the automaker since the end of last year, “including national strike action if necessary.”

Fain’s speech was part of the UAW’s “Keep the Promise” campaign that claims to be aimed at forcing Stellantis to follow through on commitments it made in its 2023 contract. Speaking live from UAW Solidarity House in Detroit, Fain adopted the same posture of militancy that he used during the contract negotiations last year to promote the union’s bogus “stand up” strikes.

While he inveighed against “billionaires and corporate executives” who “have gotten richer and more powerful” at the expense of “working class families,” Fain covered up the fact that the UAW knowingly worked with Stellantis, Ford and GM in negotiating sellout contracts that gave the companies the okay to move ahead with restructuring of the auto industry for electric vehicle production.

The ink was barely dry on the 2023 contract when Stellantis announced it was laying off thousands of Temporary Part Time (TPT) workers who had been promised permanent full time positions as a means of getting them to vote for the agreement. Meanwhile, Stellantis began eliminating shifts, including gutting more than 3,600 jobs at its Detroit Assembly Complex-Mack and Toledo Assembly Complex.

Fain said not one word about the imminent layoff of nearly 2,500 auto workers at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant (WTAP) north of Detroit, which the UAW has completely accepted. Fain’s online speech was a continuation of the misnamed “Day of Action” rally at WTAP on September 12, where the UAW President addressed a small assembly of union bureaucrats and was largely boycotted by auto workers because they are fed up with the lies of the UAW leadership.

Fain’s online speech was a response by the UAW bureaucracy—and its pseudo-left advisors—to the anger and outrage among auto workers over the expanding attack on jobs since the sellout contracts were adopted last fall. Like it did with the “stand up” strikes, which had little to no impact on the auto companies, the Fain leadership is seeking to head off any independent action by workers against the auto companies by carrying out another stunt.

In response, autoworkers must continue to build the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network in order to prepare a fight against both management and their UAW cronies.

The struggle by auto workers against layoffs is part of a growing rebellion against the union apparatus and their role as collaboration with the employers, the US government and the Democratic Party.

This revolt finds a powerful expression in the strike by 33,000 Boeing workers in Washington, California and Oregon who voted by 95 percent to reject a sellout contract negotiated by the International Association of Machinists with the aerospace manufacturer and walked off the job one week ago.

The rising anger of the rank and file was evident in the comments during the live stream. One worker posted, “You sold me out at Warren Truck,” another wrote, “All this talk about ‘Keeping the promise,’ yet nobody is speaking on how TPT’s are still getting screwed over. After a contract that was marketed towards TPT’s! Just admit y’all used us for votes!,” and another wrote, “Where were you when over 500 TPT’s were terminated in January?!?! You didn’t keep your promise.”

Fain was visibly very nervous and had the look of fear in his eyes during his presentation. The fact that the UAW is now forced to pretend that it is going to do something about the layoffs which began ten months ago is a sign of a very deep crisis of the union apparatus.

Fain said he was going to present, “how we’re preparing to take action at Stellantis to enforce our contract and make this company keep the promise they made to the American people up to and including national strike action if necessary.”

But his “action” plan is based entirely on telling workers they

should maintain the false hope that the rotten contract the union signed with Stellantis can be used to persuade the company to change course. This is the same lie the union has pushed on autoworkers that has not defended a single job over the last 50 years.

Meanwhile, Fain claimed that the 2023 contract negotiations, “we made damn sure to win not just billions in product and investment commitments. We fought for and won the right to strike over that product investment and commitments.”

First of all, the UAW bureaucracy gave the companies an out on all of its “product and investment commitments” because they were contingent upon favorable “market conditions.” The “job security language” in the contract is worthless and the actions of Stellantis since the signing of the 2023 contract is proof of this fact.

Secondly, the right to strike is a legally protected act under the First Amendment of the US Constitution, not the product of “negotiations.” Far from “winning” this right at the bargaining table, the UAW and other major unions long ago bargained it away by including “no strike” clauses as a standard feature of union contracts.

The new contract includes a byzantine and narrow process by which workers can contractually conduct limited strikes over the single issue of product allocation, and even then after a lengthy grievance process. The right to strike, including a nationwide strike, is a fundamental right that the Fain leadership is actually seeking to prevent.

Fain then went on to elaborate how the UAW is going to be “enforcing a contract for all of us.” He said the union had “filed grievances at 28 Stellantis locals covering tens of thousands of UAW members.” He went on to describe the three-step process of the grievance which can be dragged out by the company for three weeks.

Then, “if the grievance still isn’t resolved, each local has a 60-day window to take a strike authorization vote and notify the company,” and then “we meet with the company seven times and either resolve the issue or take strike action as our union sees fit.”

This is truly mutiny on one’s knees. What this really amounts to is the bureaucracy stalling for time to allow anger to dissipate. Above all they are terrified that a movement uniting autoworkers with Boeing workers, dockworkers and others over the course of the next few weeks could quickly spiral out of their control.

A related purpose is to ensure that auto workers do nothing to disrupt the election campaign of Democrat Kamala Harris for president before the November elections.

In the livestream, Fain sought to whip up divisive nationalism, blaming foreigners for ruining Stellantis. Fain said, “The product commitment in our national agreement is not just a contract with Stellantis with Auto Workers. It’s a contract with the American people.” He denounced the company for moving the production of the Dodge Durango

from Detroit to Windsor, Canada and, of course, did not offer a strategy for US and Canadian auto workers to conduct a unified struggle against the global auto corporations in defense of all jobs. Fain referred to Stellantis as, “formerly Chrysler, an iconic American company,” that is violating “its commitment to America.”

He then moved into a diatribe against the Portuguese CEO of Stellantis Carlos Tavares, saying, “We aren’t the problem, the market isn’t the problem, Carlos Tavares is the problem.” On the basis of lawsuit filed against Stellantis by shareholders and suppliers and denunciations of Tavares by the national dealer’s council, Fain constructed the argument that auto workers have a common interest with Wall Street, auto parts suppliers and the owners of car dealerships.

This false identification of the interests of workers with management and shareholders has been used for decades to slash hundreds of thousands of factory jobs, in the name of restoring the companies to profitability. While Fain tried to appear militant, even briefly referring to the “refusal” of earlier union administrations to fight, his actual program is exactly the same.

Their identification with US corporations is closely bound up with Fain and the bureaucracy’s support for US imperialism. Fain is a close ally of President Biden, who refers to the unions as his “domestic NATO,” and routinely refers to the so-called “Arsenal of Democracy” during World War II as the model for today.

Fain is now seeking to line US auto workers up behind the Harris campaign, which is involved in the Israeli genocide in Gaza and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

There is no way to conduct a struggle to defend jobs in auto or any industry without a direct challenge to the “right” of the corporations to make decisions about shutting down factories or moving production from one location to another, based on profit considerations, without a direct struggle against the world capitalist system.

Mounting such a struggle requires workers to take the conduct of the fight against the employers out of the control of the union apparatus and place it into the hands of the rank and file. Workers can conduct this fight by organizing rank-and-file committees on the factory floor, democratically controlled by workers themselves, to establish connections with workers in other industries and in other countries.



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