

10-day strike by UAW International staffers in New York ends

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The 10-day strike by United Auto Workers regional temporary organizers and local staff members in New York City against the UAW International Executive Board ended Wednesday night with UAW Staff United (USU) announcing it had reached a tentative agreement. In an X post Thursday morning, the staff union said, “After 10 days on strike, the IEB moved on key demands on layoff protections.”

USU is made up of about 40 members in UAW Region 9A, which includes eastern New York, New England and Puerto Rico. In New York City, the region covers academic workers at New York University, Columbia University and The New School, as well as Legal Aid Society lawyers and publishing workers at HarperCollins.

The conflict centered on the low wages and part-time status the UAW International apparatus keeps its lower-level organizers, negotiators, public relations and other staff members on. In a December 2 press release announcing the unfair labor practices strike, USU organizers announced they had launched it in “response to bad faith bargaining committed by the UAW throughout our negotiation process and the retaliatory termination of a union leader.”

USU specifically denounced the UAW International’s practice of using temporary organizers, who work under three-month contracts for up to three years, as an “exploitative tiered system of employment for USU staff.” Instead, it has called for an end to the three-year cap on employment, four weeks notice of non-renewal, longer durations of employment and protections against layoffs.

The UAW International has been thoroughly hostile to the minimal demands of its low-level staffers, no matter how much USU organizers have sworn their loyalty to UAW President Shawn Fain and his bogus claims about “democratizing” the union apparatus.

In a May 5, 2023 statement, USU organizers recounted how they had informed Fain on March 27, 2023 that “they were forming a union in order to collectively address issues which could improve the quality of representation of our members and further build on our new International Executive Board’s vision of a union truly run by its members.”

But before an NLRB election and recognition of the USU, the UAW International announced that the UAW Staff Council—which secures the high salaries for the UAW International representatives—filed its own NLRB petition to represent temporary organizers nationwide. The move, the USU letter said,

was a “clear attempt to destroy our new union.”

This recalled what happened during the previous effort by temporary organizers to unionize in 2018, the letter stated, when “they were swiftly retaliated against and laid off en masse by the infamous former President Gary Jones, affiliated with the same Administration Caucus which dominates the Staff Council to this day.”

Union-busting by the union

In response to the staff members’ walkout, the UAW bureaucracy immediately cut off their pay. One USU organizer told the *Detroit News*, “It’s pretty disheartening to see people who we had formerly helped elect to use many of the same tactics at the bargaining table that we’ve seen [when] we work for our members to fight managers. ... It’s really disturbing to watch a union union-bust.”

This episode only further demonstrates that the only thing that has changed since the installation of Fain and his Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) slate in March 2023 has been the rhetoric of the UAW apparatus, not its pro-corporate, anti-democratic and bureaucratic character.

If this is the way Fain & Co. treat their own hirelings, the abuse the UAW bureaucracy metes out to rank-and-file workers is a million times worse. This has been shown most clearly in the UAW bureaucracy’s sellout of 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers after the bogus “stand up strike” in late 2023, which paved the way for the UAW-approved firing of thousands of temporary workers and indefinite layoffs for thousands of full-time autoworkers.

Since taking office, Fain has overseen the sellout of one strike after another, including at Clarios, Mack Trucks, CNH Industrial, The New School, the University of California, Dakkota and Eaton Aerospace, to name just a few. Fain and other UAW bureaucrats have forced workers to repeatedly vote on pro-company contracts they previously rejected, and joined management in blackmailing workers into accepting “last, best and final” offers under the threat of being replaced by strikebreakers.

Fain became the foremost “labor spokesperson” for first Biden, then Harris, and promoted these warmongers and lifelong

corporate shills as champions of the working class, providing the fascist Trump with the opportunity to exploit popular anger over the economic and social crisis and win the election. In public appearances with the Democratic candidates, the bureaucracy silenced the anti-genocide protests of their own UAW members.

In fact, Fain, who had spent 20 years climbing up the ladder of the UAW apparatus, including the previous 10 years as a top staffer at the union's national "Solidarity House" headquarters in Detroit, was brought into power through a thoroughly undemocratic election.

Faced with a rank-and-file rebellion after the exposure of widespread corruption in the UAW apparatus, including extortion of union dues and the taking of corporate bribes in exchange for signing pro-company sweetheart contracts, the US Labor Department engineered the first-ever direct membership vote for top union officers in 2022.

Will Lehman

After rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman was nominated as a candidate for union president at the UAW Constitutional Convention in July 2022—running on a program of abolishing the UAW bureaucracy and transferring power to workers on the shop floor—the union apparatus did everything it could to suppress the turnout for the vote. The UAW officials' refusal to update mailing addresses and publicize the elections, along with other anti-democratic measures, resulted in a record low vote of 9 percent in the first round.

Fain would go on to win the rigged election, which was sanctioned by Biden's US Labor Department and praised by the UAWD for paving the way for "union reformers to make labor history."

Early on, Lehman, who ran as a socialist and fighter for the international unity of autoworkers, warned that the only result from the election of Fain would be a sharp increase in the income of the new UAW chief and his entourage.

Indeed, Fain oversees a bloated bureaucracy, which controlled assets worth \$1,136,712,055 at the end of 2023, according to the union's financial filing with the US Department of Labor. His reported salary was \$228,000, nearly 10 times more than the temporary part-time workers whose mass firing was sanctioned by Fain & Co. Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) who led Harvard grad workers to a sellout in 2021, got \$203,829 in 2023.

Fain hired a host of other DSA members and operatives for Bernie Sanders and other Democratic Party-aligned campaigns, including former *Labor Notes* staff writer and organizer Jonah Furman (who was paid \$106,667 by the UAW in 2023 as an "Administrative Assistant") and Ben Dictor whose New York City law firm, Eisner & Dictor was paid \$484,870 by the UAW for legal services in 2023.

In a USU press release issued before the strike ended, the staff organizers said they were not "after higher salaries" and the

"whopping six figure salaries that [our] supervisors in the Staff Council make." Whatever the personal motivation of this or that organizer, there is a relentless political evolution of those seeking careers in the labor bureaucracy, whether they wish to recognize it or not.

In fact, it serves the purpose of the UAW apparatus to have low-paid "rank-and-file organizers" to gather dues-paying members so they can be sold out. It is no doubt the case that these organizers were directly involved in the sellout of strikes, particularly by academic workers in recent years. Moreover, being drawn from the DSA and other pseudo-left organizations, many of them have perpetuated the lie that the corporatist, pro-capitalist and pro-war UAW bureaucracy has been "reformed," a lie that has had devastating consequences for workers.

This was demonstrated in the above-mentioned press release, which stated, "The UAW's current layoff proposal leaves staffers as precarious as at-will employees, and shows how little management understands the needs of their own campaigns. It also clearly signals that layoffs in the labor movement are coming as we head into a second Trump administration."

In fact, the UAW's "campaigns" are all aimed at deceiving workers as it colludes with corporate management and the capitalist political parties to destroy the jobs and living standards of workers and suppress opposition to social inequality, war and dictatorship. As for the incoming Trump administration, Fain has already signaled his willingness to collaborate with the fascist president on his plans for trade war and military confrontation with China and American imperialism's other competitors.

Only a rank-and-file rebellion aimed at abolishing the UAW apparatus can transfer power and decision-making from the bureaucracy to workers themselves, as fought for by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Such a fight will be integral to the development, being spearheaded by the Socialist Equality Party, for an industrial and political counteroffensive by the working class against capitalism and the socialist transformation of society.



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