

UAW knocks out Big Three auto companies

written by Stephen Millies
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United Auto Workers strike rally in Detroit on Sept. 15.

Dumping cutbacks by fighting back

The strike of the United Auto Workers against General Motors, Ford and Stellantis (Chrysler and Jeep) is a big step forward for all workers and poor people. The tentative agreements with these corporations — whose sales total \$500 billion — signal an end to a decades-long retreat of givebacks and wage cuts.

UAW members won wage increases of at least 25%. More importantly, the lowest-paid auto workers will get increases of 150%.

Raising the pay more for those on the bottom largely eliminates the outrageous wage tiers that were implemented in 2008 during the Great Recession. These tiers resulted in big differences of pay for UAW members doing the same work simply because of the date they were hired.

This victory for equality builds solidarity.

Cost-of-living wage increases, to compensate for inflation, have been restored. Pensions have increased. The UAW even forced the reopening of the Chrysler plant in Belvidere, Illinois, near Rockford.

Workers at any future electric battery or car plants will be brought under the UAW Big Three contract.

No wonder former Ford vice-president, Chrysler president and General Motors vice-chairman [Bob Lutz hates the union contract](#). “This is not like other labor negotiations,” Lutz said. “This was a gun to the head from a government-sanctioned monopoly called the labor union.”

The Washington Post — whose billionaire owner Jeff Bezos runs Amazon.com — [didn't like the UAW contract](#) either. Listen up, Bezos: Your \$160-billion stash won't stop Amazon workers from getting a union.

Toyota, whose U.S. plants are non-union, promptly [announced it was raising wages](#) by at least \$2.94 per hour.

This wasn't generosity. It's trying to keep the UAW out of Toyota's factories.

UAW President Shawn Fain announced that the union is planning organizing drives at Tesla, Toyota and other non-union outfits. Full speed ahead!

Ending a long retreat

Back in 1970, 321,000 UAW members in the United States struck General Motors for 67 days. Another 21,000 workers, now represented by Unifor, struck GM plants in Canada for 94 days.

They won retirement after 30 years on the job ("30 and out"), as well as getting 95% of their pay during layoffs.

During the same period, mass demonstrations demanded an end to the Vietnam War. Access to food stamps, now called SNAP benefits, was expanded. Women and LGBTQ+ people demanded equality.

Despite Richard Nixon in the White House, both the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) were established.

On July 24, 1973, two Black workers — Larry Carter and Issac Shorter — had enough of Chrysler's racist management and dangerous working conditions. They turned off the power at the company's Jefferson Avenue assembly plant on the east side of Detroit in the first big sit-down strike in 36 years.

There were [6,074 strikes](#) across the United States in 1974.

The wealthy and powerful counterattacked, taking advantage of recessions and job-

killing automation. U.S. corporations make super-profits by exploiting millions of workers in other lands.

Today GM has 170,000 fewer workers in the U.S. than it did in 1970. While 29.1% of all workers belonged to unions in 1970, only 10.3% were union members in 2021.

Wall Street demanded 50,000 New York City public workers be fired during the 1975 municipal debt crisis.

When Chrysler got financial guarantees from the federal government in 1979, the deal resulted in 30,000 workers being fired in Detroit alone. Chrysler's workforce went from 70% Black to 30%.

So much of the burden of 6 million manufacturing jobs being destroyed fell upon Black workers.

White family median income fell in the Midwest by 7.1% from 1978 to 1982. That's a recession.

During those same years Black family median income fell in the Midwest by 35.8%. That's a great depression.

Instead of young workers getting jobs with union wages and benefits, many were railroaded to prisons instead. Two million prisoners are members of the working class, too.

Why aren't Trump and the rest of the billionaire criminals locked up instead? The labor movement needs to demand "jobs, not jails!"

Palestine needs labor solidarity

The UAW strike and the election of Shawn Fain as UAW president means not only an end to almost 50 years of givebacks. It's also breaking with 75 years of the labor

movement knuckling-under to an anti-communist witch hunt that started in the late 1940s.

AFL-CIO President George Meany supported the dirty U.S. war against Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia that killed millions, including 58,000 GIs. Meany's home union, Plumbers' Local No. 1 in Howard Beach, New York City, didn't have a single Black or Puerto Rican apprentice in 1963.

The same year Meany refused to endorse the March for Jobs and Freedom, where Dr. King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech.

In contrast, Shawn Fain announced: "We went to each of the Big Three and proposed an expiration date of April 30, 2028. We did this for several reasons. First, this allows us to strike on May Day, or International Workers' Day."

The workers of Chicago gave May Day to the world in 1886 and their leaders were hanged for it. Even since then capitalists have tried to smother it.

Palestine is also a working-class issue. Just as Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos were bombed, U.S.-made bombs are being dropped on Gaza, killing thousands of Palestinian children.

President Biden is demanding billions of more dollars to kill Palestinians. There's nothing more cynical in U.S. history than the Big Oil government in Washington supporting the Zionist regime occupying Palestine.

U.S. war secretary Henry Stimson refused to bomb the railroad tracks leading to the Auschwitz extermination camp. Anne Frank's family was denied a U.S. visa.

Henry Ford was the biggest Jew-baiter in U.S. history. His car dealers distributed a Ford-owned newspaper that ran a 91-week long lying series called the "The International Jew."

Ford was also a union-buster, whose thugs beat up UAW organizers, including future union president Walter Reuther.

GM's Opel subsidiary was Hitler's biggest truck maker. IBM's punch cards were indispensable to organize the extermination of Jewish and Roma people.

None of this prevents the Israeli regime from allowing Ford, GM and IBM to have facilities in occupied Palestine.

Mark Diamondstein, who is Jewish, is president of the 200,000-strong American Postal Workers Union. At a recent AFL-CIO executive council meeting, [Diamondstein urged the council](#) to demand a ceasefire in Israel's attacks.

All of labor should support the APWU president. "Solidarity Forever" means solidarity with all oppressed people, including the children of Gaza.

