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USA

# **Auto Workers Strike All of the Big Three Companies for the First Time**

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**The United Auto Workers (UAW), whose 450,000 members work principally in manufacturing and parts plants, has for the first time in its history struck all three of the largest U.S. companies, Ford, General Motors, and Stellantis (Chrysler and Jeep). The union is striking for a 40% wage increase over four years, restoration of pension benefits, retirees' health care, cost-of-living allowance, more paid holidays, greater profit sharing, a 32-hour work week, and an end to forced overtime.**

The union particularly wants to end tiers and "temporary work" that may last for years and provide no benefits. The UAW also seeks to ensure union job security as the industry makes the transition to electric vehicles (EVs). The union's strategy is to walk out only at selected plants. It has begun by striking three of 54 plants, one from each company, that produce trucks which are very profitable.

Union president Shawn Fain, told the members shortly before the strike:

The companies know what our priorities are. They've made a quarter of a trillion dollars in North American profits over the last decade while they nickel-and-dime our members every day. They price gouge the American consumer, and they squeeze the U.S. taxpayer for every dime they can get. The big three can afford to immediately give us our fair share; if they choose not to then they are responsible for the strike.

Fain, 54 years old and a union electrician for 29 years, has been a union official for twenty years, serving as skilled trades committeeperson and shop chair at a Stellantis plant and then for ten years as a UAW international representative. He was backed by Unite All Workers for Democracy, a reform slate, and won the presidency earlier this year by just 500 votes. He blames the UAW's former corrupt, company-union leadership for making concessions in wages, pensions, and cost of living. Fain, who begins each day reading the Bible and praying, launched the strike quoting the Gospels several times and called upon his members to have faith in themselves.

I have always believed that UAW members serve a higher power, we have a mission and a calling. We fight not only for the good of our union or for the good of our members and our families, we fight for the good of the entire working class and the poor....I tell you this, I'm at peace with the decision to strike if we have to because I know that we're on the right side in this battle, because it's a battle of the working class against the rich, the halves versus the have nots, the billionaire class against everybody else.

Polls show that 75 percent of Americans back the UAW strikers and President Joseph Biden and [Senator Bernie Sanders](#) have both indicated their support.

The UAW members are striking to defend their union and its future. From the 1940s to the 1970s, the UAW represented the majority of workers in the auto industry. During those years, under the leadership of Walter Reuther, a social democrat, the UAW was the flagship of the U.S. labor movement. The union peaked at 1.5 million members in 1979.

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From the 1970s to the 2000s the UAW lost its domination of the industry as foreign companies—Volkswagen, Toyota, Hyundai, and others—established plants in the United States and successfully resisted unionization. Today those companies manufacture half of all cars made in the U.S.—and not one has been unionized. At the same time, union leadership entered into partnership agreements with the companies and the leaders became corrupt, robbing from the union.

The challenge today is the transition from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles. EV plants require less labor and nearly all the batteries used in EVs are produced in nonunion plants. Elon Musk's Tesla company that produces EVs is nonunion.

This strike is important then not only to win for the members and retirees, but also demonstrate the union's willingness and ability to fight for its future.

*17 September 2023*

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