

# Auto Workers Call on Unions to Align Contract Expirations (<https://labornotes.org/blogs/2023/11/auto-workers-call-unions-align-contract-expirations>)

November 22, 2023 / [Dan DiMaggio](#), Labor Notes



Auto Workers President Shawn Fain has called for lining up contract expiration dates across the labor movement. Photo: UAW.

Is it time for a big, united strike by millions of union members against the billionaire class?

We get pitched this idea sometimes at Labor Notes. Usually we dismiss it as coming from starry-eyed dreamers eager to pass over the hard work of organizing and skip ahead to the “general strike.”

But now the call is coming from a major international union: the United Auto Workers, whose new contracts covering 146,000 workers at the Big 3 are strategically set to expire on May 1, 2028. The union wants others in the labor movement to align their own expirations for that date, setting up a battle with some of the country’s biggest corporations in four-and-a-half years.

“If I could have a dream scenario,” UAW President Shawn Fain told *In These Times*, “it would be that all of organized labor maps their expiration dates to May 1.”

## MAY DAY

“May Day was born out of an intense struggle by workers in the United States to win an eight-hour day,” said Fain. “That’s a struggle that’s just as relevant today as it was in 1889,” when the international labor movement began holding yearly demonstrations for an eight-hour day to commemorate the Haymarket martyrs who lost their lives for their role in big Chicago protests for a shorter workday a few years earlier.

The fight for a shorter workweek could feature in 2028 negotiations. One of the UAW’s public demands in this round of bargaining was for a 32-hour week at 40 hours’ pay. Auto workers are often forced to work mandatory overtime, including 60-hour weeks (six 10-hour days).

Although that proposal went nowhere with the companies, raising it broached the topic.

“If there was one good thing that came out of Covid—with all the loss of life and the bad things that went on—it was that working-class people realized that life shouldn’t revolve around working seven days a week, 12 or 16 hours a day, or working multiple jobs just to survive,” Fain said.

## COORDINATED CONTRACTS

Unions seem to be discovering that engaging in high-profile public fights with employers can be to their benefit. We’ve seen that with the Teamsters at UPS this year, and most recently with the UAW, whose no-holds-barred campaign against the Big 3 reportedly

inspired thousands of auto workers at non-union plants to reach out and ask how to join.

“If we’re going to truly take on the billionaire class and rebuild the economy so that it starts to work for the benefit of the many and not the few,” Fain said on Facebook Live, “then it’s important that we not only strike, but that we strike together.”

So what if a bunch of unions say they’re all going to walk out on May 1, 2028, unless their employers offer record contracts to make up for years of runaway inequality?

What if they align some of their demands—like demands for an end to forced overtime, and for the restoration of the eight-hour day? Or, hell, for workers to share in the gains of productivity with a 32-hour week at 40 hours’ pay. Or for a return to real pensions.

What if newly unionized workers fighting for first contracts join them?

Not only could it push the employers, it would also put some big pressure on politicians, in a presidential election year, to back solutions that help working people.

Sure, it’s hard enough to even get a union to coordinate its contracts with the same employer: the Communications Workers have multiple expiration dates at AT&T; the Food and Commercial Workers have more than 100 different contracts with Kroger that expire at different times; and on and on.

But maybe this bold idea is the push the labor movement needs.



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