

New UAW corruption investigations expose fraud of “reform” under Fain

Marcus Day
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On Monday, it was revealed that the United Auto Workers union’s top leadership is under renewed investigation by a federal monitor, marking a significant escalation of a long-standing crisis gripping the UAW apparatus.

UAW President Shawn Fain and UAW Secretary-Treasurer Margaret Mock—the UAW’s two highest-ranking officers—are each being investigated in relation to competing claims of financial misconduct, according to a report filed by the monitor in federal court Monday. Another member of the UAW’s executive board, a regional director unnamed in the report, is also under investigation after being accused of embezzlement.

Earlier this year, Fain moved to strip first Mock and then UAW Vice President Rich Boyer of their departmental assignments, claiming they had failed to carry out their duties. Mock and Boyer, for their part, allege that the moves against them by Fain were in retaliation for their refusal to engage in financial misconduct and misuse union funds.

All three ran on the same Members United/Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) slate in the 2022-2023 national UAW elections, claiming they were pursuing “reforms” in the UAW, rooting out corruption and restoring “transparency” and “union democracy.”

But in unusually blunt language, the monitor stated that Fain’s administration is “obstructing and interfering with” its investigations, refusing to hand over tens of thousands of documents requested as part of the probe.

The monitor’s report raises more questions than it answers, providing no detailed information about the alleged misconduct. The supposedly “independent monitor”—in reality staffed by two corporate law firms with intimate ties to the auto companies—made clear in its report that it was at pains to reach an agreement with the UAW apparatus that would keep the relevant documents secret, concealed from the rank-and-file UAW membership and the broader public.

Workers, however, have an elementary right to information about where their dues are going and any potential misuse by the UAW’s top leadership. They should demand the release of all the documents related to the monitor’s probe, as Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman has called for.

Even given the little information which the monitor has made available, what is revealed is a corrupt, conspiratorial

bureaucracy which continues to dominate the UAW.

Under Fain, the UAW bureaucracy has persisted as a pro-corporate institution with social and material interests distinct from and hostile to those of the workers it claims to represent. The hundreds of bureaucrats at the UAW’s “Solidarity House” headquarters continue to receive their six-figure salaries and special privileges, and “UAW, Inc.” has grown its more than \$1 billion stock and investment portfolio.

Meanwhile, thousands of autoworkers have been fired or laid off under Fain’s supposedly “historic” contracts at the Big Three companies since the start of the year. Wages for workers remain below where they were 20 years ago, adjusted for inflation, and the workweek has grown longer and more grueling. And workers continue to face deadly conditions in the factories, as the recent horrific death of 28-year-old Daulton Simmers at a Caterpillar foundry demonstrates.

The federal investigation into UAW corruption began nearly a decade ago. It was initiated following the rebellion by Fiat Chrysler autoworkers against a pro-company, UAW-backed agreement in 2015, leading sections of the state to grow concerned that blatant criminality among the UAW’s top officials was fatally eroding their ability to control the rank and file.

The subsequent investigation revealed a sprawling conspiracy among the UAW leadership to embezzle workers’ dues and accept bribes from the corporations in return for company-friendly contracts. Two former UAW presidents—each one previously claiming he was “cleaning up” union corruption—were indicted and pleaded guilty for their part in the conspiracy.

Direct elections for the union’s national leadership were held for the first time in 2022, after UAW members overwhelmingly voted in favor of them in a 2021 referendum, over the opposition of the UAW’s longstanding ruling caucus.

The entrenched UAW bureaucracy, however, did everything in its power to keep workers in the dark about the elections and block them from participating. In the first round, turnout was limited to just 9 percent, the lowest in any national union election in US history. In the 2023 runoff for UAW president, Fain prevailed by a margin of just 500 votes, ultimately coming into office with the support of just 3 percent of rank-and-file

UAW members.

The UAW apparatus was particularly concerned to suppress awareness of the campaign for UAW president of Will Lehman, the socialist and Mack Trucks worker. Lehman was the sole candidate who called for the abolition, not the reform, of the UAW bureaucracy, and the transfer of decision-making power directly to workers, organized in a network of rank-and-file committees. Despite the suppression of voter turnout, Lehman won nearly 5,000 votes in the first round of the election.

In a series of official challenges and lawsuits, Lehman had documented and fought the efforts of the UAW apparatus to suppress the right to vote. In November 2022, Lehman had demanded that the voting deadline be extended and that genuine notice of the elections be provided to all UAW members.

However, the federal monitor and the Biden administration's Department of Labor sided with the UAW apparatus in arguing against Lehman's suit, instead seeking to provide an aura of legitimacy to the elections and stability to Fain's administration.

But now the credibility of Fain's administration, never firmly established, is beginning to seriously unravel.

Whatever the precise origins of the conflicts within the UAW leadership, they are undoubtedly bound up with the growing anger among rank-and-file members over the UAW's sellout of the 2023 Big Three workers' struggle, as well as the rising anger over Fain and the UAW's endorsement of "Genocide Joe" Biden. Just days before the monitor's report was filed, the UAW shut down the strike by tens of thousands of University of California academic workers who had walked out to halt the police repression of pro-Gaza protests.

It has taken little more than a year for the "reform" pretensions of Fain & Co. to be exposed as nothing more than hypocritical lies, aimed at giving a facelift to the UAW bureaucracy's corporatist, anti-worker policies. Both Fain and his erstwhile running mates-turned-critics made their careers climbing the rungs of the apparatus, each one implicated in numerous sellouts.

The latest UAW scandal at the same time presents a crisis for the White House. Biden, increasingly reviled for his role in the genocide in Gaza and pro-corporate policies, has sought to rely upon UAW President Shawn Fain to contain the growing militancy among autoworkers, upholding him as a great "labor leader" in his State of the Union address earlier this year. Mouthings radical-sounding phrases, Fain has emerged as a foremost shill for Biden's reelection.

Biden has pursued a policy of corporatism—the integration of the union apparatus into the state and corporate management—which is aimed above all at subordinating the working class to war. What both Fain and Biden mean when they speak of the "arsenal of democracy" is the enforcement of a wartime economy to escalate the war against Russia and

prepare for war against China.

The latest revelations are, at the same time, a devastating exposure of all those—such as the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)—who claimed that the UAW apparatus could be "reformed" and made to serve the interests of workers. In reality, Fain's administration has served as a pipeline to elevate the DSA's Democratic Party operatives into leading positions within the UAW apparatus, serving as its strategists, spokesmen and go-betweens with the White House.

Tellingly, the DSA and its affiliated *Jacobin* magazine, as well as Labor Notes and UAWD, have all maintained a guilty silence on the news of the investigation into Fain's administration, now three days after it was reported.

Definite conclusions should be drawn from this experience. The shuffling of positions at the top of the UAW bureaucracy has resolved none of the burning issues facing workers. The UAW apparatus, moreover, expresses perhaps most starkly the reactionary, pro-corporate and pro-imperialist role of the union bureaucracies universally, from the Teamsters to the American Federation of Teachers, and their many corollaries, in the US and internationally.

As a resolution passed by a meeting of rank-and-file committees in March 2023 predicted:

The UAW's collaboration with the government and corporations, the betrayal of workers' interests, and the suppression of their democratic rights will not be changed by the replacement of [former UAW President Ray] Curry by Fain.

What is required is the transfer of power to the rank and file and the elimination of the entire UAW apparatus.

The urgent task is to build the network of rank-and-file committees, organizing as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, and to fuse the struggle for workers' interests with the fight against genocide and imperialist war.



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