Former UAW presidential candidate Brian Keller promotes UAW bureaucrat Shawn Fain in fraudulent run-off vote

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7 February 2023

Brian Keller, a worker at the Stellantis MOPAR parts facility in suburban Detroit and candidate for United Auto Workers president in the first round of the election, has given his full support to long-time UAW bureaucrat Shawn Fain in the illegitimate run-off election for union president.

On February 2, Keller invited Fain to a live video broadcast on his "UAW Real Talk GM, Ford, FCA" Facebook page. Keller continuously expressed confidence in Fain, declaring that he was sure Fain would do the "right thing" if elected UAW president. Keller urged rank-and-file workers to cast their ballots for Fain, saying they would be "voting for change" and "sending a message" to the UAW leadership.

Keller brushed aside the fact that Fain was a member of the UAW-Chrysler National Negotiating Committee in 2009 and 2011, when the committee unanimously imposed massive concessions on workers, including cutting the wages of all new hires in half, eliminating cost-of-living (COLA) protections and vastly expanding the use of highly exploited temporary workers. By 2015, Fain was number two in the UAW-Fiat Chrysler department under Norwood Jewell, who was later convicted of taking illegal payoffs from management to fix contracts. It strains belief that Fain did not know of the corruption going on under his nose.

During the February 2 event, Keller absurdly claimed Fain was merely a "subordinate" who had to "do what he was told," and therefore had no responsibility for the massive betrayals carried out by the UAW leadership.

This is a complete about-face of what Keller said when he was running against Fain during the first round of the UAW elections. He repeatedly denounced Fain as a tool of the corrupt UAW apparatus whose record in selling out workers was no different than incumbent UAW president Ray Curry.

In a live broadcast on his Facebook page on September 11, 2022, for example, Keller declared, "Shawn Fain is part of Ray Curry's caucus. Shawn Fain is the administrative assistant for the Chrysler department under Cindy Estrada. You know what Cindy Estrada did to GM workers and you know what she is doing to Chrysler workers. And Shawn Fain has gone along with the whole entire program. Shawn Fain helped negotiate those concessionary company friendly agreements. He also helped push those agreements. But he wants to act like he's not part of Ray Curry's caucus."

During the February 2 event, Fain studiously avoided making specific promises for actions he would take if elected. He did not pledge to win back lost concessions, root out massive corruption within the apparatus, or fight the collusion of the UAW bureaucracy at all levels with management against the rights of rank-and-file members.

Fain repeatedly referenced the failure of the incumbent Curry to win "job security" and "product commitments." As UAW members are well aware, these have long been code words used by UAW bureaucrats to signal their readiness to impose concessions on workers aimed at boosting competitiveness of the auto companies, supposedly in the name of "saving jobs."

When Keller made tentative efforts to pin Fain down to specifics, Fain would deflect with scripted phrases such as "the gloves will come off" and we will "fight like hell," etc.

Early in the event, Keller said he would not accept an appointment to the UAW international staff, apparently addressing concerns that he had been promised a job in return for his endorsement of Fain. However, later he made a not-too-subtle pitch for a union position, telling Fain directly that he would be interested in being part of the UAW negotiating team in the upcoming national auto contract negotiations.

Keller is also apparently not burning his bridges with the Curry faction either. During the event, Keller also announced his support for Chuck Browning for vice president, who currently heads the union's Ford department. Browning is running on the same slate as incumbent UAW President Ray Curry.

The current run-off being conducted by the UAW bureaucracy and the court-appointed UAW Monitor is a complete fraud. In an official protest filed with the monitor on December 19, Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president Will Lehman documented a host of gross violations of democratic procedures, which led to a turnout of less than 10 percent of the eligible voters in the first round.

This included the refusal of the leadership to update membership address lists to send out ballots or to properly inform members of the first direct election in the union's history. Although this was mandated under the UAW Monitor's election rules, the court-appointed monitor did nothing to enforce these mandates.

Because of Lehman's protest, filed on December 19, the UAW

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Monitor has not yet been able to certify the first round of the election. At the same time, the monitor has ignored Lehman's request for a redo of the first round of voting or the inclusion of all the candidates in the current run-off.

In contrast to the first round, workers are now being bombarded by campaign materials, including multiple e-mails and signs all over the plants informing them of the runoff between Curry and Fain.

During Keller's February 2 event, neither he nor Fain said anything about the deliberate disenfranchisement of UAW members and Lehman's protest. While acknowledging that many members have told him the election is "rigged," Keller has lent his support to the sham runoff between two hand-picked candidates of the UAW bureaucracy.

In the first round of elections, many workers voted for Keller because he is perceived as a vocal critic of the corrupt UAW bureaucracy. Keller won a majority of votes in a number of key UAW locals, including at Ford's Kentucky Truck Plant, Stellantis Mack Assembly in Detroit and Volvo Trucks New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia, the scene of a militant strike and rebellion against the UAW bureaucracy in 2021.

Many supporters of Keller are no doubt surprised by his shift from denouncing the Solidarity House sellouts to singing the praises of the likes of Fain and Browning. But this is the logical outcome of Keller's outlook and program.

Whatever criticisms Keller has made of the UAW bureaucracy, he has consistently opposed Lehman's call for the abolition of the UAW apparatus and the transfer of decision-making power to workers on the shop floor through the formation of rank-and-file committees. Instead, Keller has insisted that workers must work within the existing bureaucratic structure. At a debate between the five candidates in the first round last September, Keller said Lehman's call for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy was "divisive."

Keller's evolution is an important experience for workers. It shows that it is impossible to consistently oppose the betrayals of the union bureaucracy while upholding the nationalist, pro-capitalist and anti-socialist program which it advances.

Writing in 2019 in response to statements by Brian Keller defending a nationalist and anti-immigrant perspective, the *World Socialist Web Site* defended an internationalist strategy. Such an outlook, the WSWS insisted, "is a basic dividing line between futile efforts to reform the UAW and the struggle to build new organizations of the working class to take on and defeat the transnational corporations and secure good-paying jobs, decent wages and democratic workers' control over production and health and safety conditions for all workers."

The WSWS continued, "If autoworkers are to fight successfully against powerful transnational corporations, they need the most advanced understanding, theory and strategy, not the most backward. Whether Keller likes it or not, the globalization of economic life is a reality. To believe that the world's productive forces can be crammed back within the confines of the nation-state is about as realistic today as the belief in the Middle Ages that the world was flat and the sun revolved around the earth."

The fact is that the unending betrayals by the UAW apparatus do not flow simply from the actions of bad or corrupt leaders, though there are plenty, but more fundamental causes. The UAW bureaucracy and other nationally based unions had no progressive answer to the increasingly global nature of capitalist production. Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, the apparatus focused on collaboration with management, driving down wages and conditions of American workers in order to boost the competitive position of US corporations versus their overseas rivals.

The campaign of socialist autoworker Will Lehman is based on the exact opposite conception as those advanced by Keller. Lehman is seeking not the reform of the UAW bureaucracy, but its abolition. He fights for an international strategy based on uniting workers of all countries in a common struggle against the transnational corporations and the entire system of capitalism. In opposition to the policy of union-management collaboration and concessions, Lehman calls on workers to build rank-and-file committees to take power into their own hands to fight for their demands, not what that the companies and UAW bureaucrats say is possible or allowable.

On December 12, Lehman issued a statement titled "Why I am not supporting Shawn Fain in run-off vote," after Fain asked him for his endorsement. In it, Lehman explained why he was not supporting either of the two union bureaucrats.

"First, the initial round of elections was completely illegitimate, and the results should not be certified. Less than 10 percent of the 1.1 million active and retired workers eligible to vote cast ballots. The two top vote getters, Curry and Fain, each received less than 4 percent of the vote of eligible members."

Lehman continued, "Fain's defense of the legitimacy of the elections is bound up with the fact that he is a longtime UAW bureaucrat who rose to the top of the trash heap in the UAW apparatus by collaborating in the destruction of the jobs, living standards and working conditions of UAW members."

If elected, Lehman continued, the only change that would occur is that Fain would increase his current salary of $156,364 as an "Administrative Assistant" at Solidarity House to the nearly $300,000 that a UAW president pockets.

Lehman has warned that the replacement of one union bureaucrat with another would do nothing to advance workers' interests. That is why his campaign has been centered on building a network of rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves, as a new center of decision-making power and struggle against the corporations.

The WSWS urges autoworkers to read the protest of the UAW election Lehman has sent to the UAW monitor, submit statements of support for the protest and join the fight to build rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace. To support Will Lehman's campaign and share your thoughts email the campaign at: willforuawpresident@gmail.com.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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