

Shawn Fain holds 645 vote lead with 1,608 ballots in question

Dispute over challenged ballots will decide winner in illegitimate UAW runoff election

Shannon Jones
5 March 2023

As the vote count ended over the weekend in the illegitimate United Auto Workers runoff election between longtime bureaucrat Shawn Fain and incumbent UAW President Ray Curry, Fain clung to a narrow 645 vote advantage.

No winner has been announced pending the resolution of a dispute involving 1,608 challenged ballots. According to a statement from Fain's campaign, "The majority of the challenged ballots revolve around questions of membership eligibility, a time-consuming process to resolve." The vote count will resume this week in Dayton, Ohio with observers from Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD), a group which is backing Fain, and the Curry campaign.

The abysmal overall turnout of about 12 percent and the razor-close vote results reflect the hostility of UAW members to both candidates. Whatever the final outcome, the winner will have no mandate to lead, securing the backing of just 7 percent of eligible UAW voters.

In the runoff election for Region 9 Director, Daniel Vicente, a supporter of UAWD, beat Lauren Farrell, the current Region 9 assistant director. In the runoff for international vice president, Chuck Browning, a member of the Curry slate, won by a wide margin. Browning is currently the head of the UAW Ford department as well as the Agricultural-Implement Department, where he oversaw the betrayal of CNH workers and is currently seeking to ram through a sellout contract at Caterpillar. Previously, Browning had served as executive administrative assistant to UAW President Dennis D. Williams, who was sentenced to prison for stealing members' dues money.

The election campaign was not a contest for the

hearts and minds of workers, but essentially a rigged "ugly contest" between various sections of the apparatus, with Fain and Curry seeking to mobilize their bureaucratic supporters in a fight over control of the UAW's massive \$1 billion-plus in assets.

Curry won in Region 1A, which includes Ford's Dearborn Truck, Michigan Assembly, Livonia transmission and smaller plants in southeast Michigan. Fain won in Region 2B covering Ohio and Indiana, including Stellantis Kokomo Transmission, Allison Transmission, GM Fort Wayne Assembly and the Stellantis Jeep complex in Toledo, Ohio.

Fain also held an edge in most Detroit-area Stellantis plants, including the massive Detroit Manufacturing Complex, Sterling Heights Assembly and Warren Truck.

Curry's margin of victory in Local 600, which includes Dearborn Truck, was 4,134 to just 1,474 for Fain. This contrasts to the vote in other Detroit area auto plants where Fain won the majority or the vote was close. Browning on the Curry slate also won Local 600, winning by a margin of 4,358 to 1,098.

The nearly 50 percent jump in the ballots cast at Local 600 from the first to the second round of voting has raised suspicion among workers. In 2015, the vote at Local 600 was at the center of controversy, with many rank-and-file workers charging vote rigging by the UAW in connection with the sellout agreement with Ford. The contract had appeared to be heading for defeat until the tally at Local 600 provided a thin margin of victory for the contract.

The 2023 runoff vote took place amid a cloud of scandal. The UAW monitor decided to allow the runoff to go forward despite the fact that the first round vote

has not yet been certified due to the protest by Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman, one of the candidates.

Lehman presented a mountain of evidence that the first round was illegitimate due to widespread and systematic voter suppression by the UAW apparatus. The apparatus did nothing to update voter lists and addresses in defiance of the UAW monitor nor did the International or locals make any real effort to inform members about the first-ever direct election. Irregularities documented by Will Lehman included UAW officials falsely telling temp workers they were not eligible to vote, despite the stipulation by the UAW monitor that temp workers as well as retirees were eligible.

Then, in February, reports surfaced that a UAW donor to Fain's election campaign received an appointment to a \$174,000-a-year position as an assistant regional director shortly after giving Fain \$25,000. UAWD confirmed that the donor, UAW Local 2320 Vice President Vail Kohnert-Yount, received an appointment as Assistant Director of Region 9A. Curry had authorized the appointment, but claimed to have not known about the large donation.

After doing nothing to publicize the first round of the elections, once the field was narrowed to just Fain and Curry, the candidates of the apparatus, the UAW leadership made more of an effort to promote the election by sending out emails and posterizing around the plants. Despite this, turnout only increased marginally. This reflected above all the alienation of masses of rank-and-file workers from the entire corrupt UAW apparatus that has overseen decades of concessions and daily colludes with management in the plant against the rights of workers.

Commenting on the UAW runoff, Will Lehman told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "The outcome of the election doesn't change the basic issues, the need to abolish the whole corrupt apparatus and transfer power to the rank and file.

"If he squeaks into office, workers should place no confidence in the hollow promises of reforms from yet another career bureaucrat Shawn Fain. Nothing will change until we, the rank and file, build a movement to take power from them and return decision-making power and control of union resources to the workers on the shop floor.

"This vote takes place under conditions in which the

UAW is trying to force through a sellout contract at Caterpillar and the mass firings at Dana Driveline in Toledo. The UAW is not only refusing to defend workers, they are telling Dana management who to fire.

"In just a few months contract negotiations will begin for 150,000 autoworkers.

"In all these struggles rank and file workers must take the initiative by linking up across plants and across industries in a network of democratically controlled committees through which we can leverage our strength and overcome the domination of the union bureaucracies."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact