

UAW election debacle continues as delay in results stretches into second week

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More than two weeks after the second round of voting concluded in the United Auto Workers presidential election, the court-appointed UAW Monitor has still not been able to announce the results. The tabulation of votes was suspended on March 4, with challenger Shawn Fain leading incumbent UAW President Ray Curry by 50.2 percent to 49.8 percent, or a mere 645 votes out of the 138,628 ballots cast. But no counting has occurred since then as the two sides fight over the eligibility of 1,608 disputed ballots.

Counting was originally set to resume on March 9. But as the date approached, the UAW Monitor—New York attorney and former bank regulator Neil Barofsky—issued a hurried statement, declaring, “Given the time-consuming nature of collecting information to resolve questions as to the eligibility status of the individuals who voted the challenged ballots, the monitor has determined that the vote count will not reconvene on March 9, 2023, as originally contemplated. Instead, the monitor, UAW, and election vendor will continue the information gathering process until a sufficient number of challenged ballots have been resolved. In light of the remaining work, we now expect to reconvene the vote count with observers present on Thursday, March 16, 2023, at a place to be determined in the Detroit metropolitan area.”

The ballots were reportedly kept under security at the counting location in Dayton, Ohio before being moved to an undisclosed location in Detroit, the home of the UAW bureaucracy’s misnamed headquarters, Solidarity House.

Behind the scenes there is no doubt a dirty fight taking place as Curry’s Administration Caucus and Fain’s Members United faction mobilize their local union cronies to validate or disqualify enough votes to secure a victory. This likely includes lining up financial secretaries at each local who are in charge of membership lists and have the power to say whether a member who cast a challenged ballot was in “good standing,” i.e., had paid up his or her union dues, by the deadline that was required.

With the president’s seat within reach, Fain told his supporters in a video comment last week to have “trust in the system” and allow the process to work itself out. He acknowledged that not every ballot cast by members had been counted—including, according to Fain, a member of the UAW

International Executive Board itself—but attributed this to “growing pains” during the first-ever direct membership vote. “The beauty is, the members have spoken,” he said, adding “We definitely want everybody’s voice heard.”

This is a lie and Fain knows it. As Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president in last year’s first round of voting, detailed in an official protest to the UAW Monitor, the entrenched UAW leadership did everything it could to suppress the vote and disenfranchise UAW members. This included defying the Monitor’s own orders to update mailing addresses and widely publicize the election to maximize participation. As a result, fewer than 10 percent of the UAW’s 1.1 million active and retired members cast ballots in the first round.

After narrowing the election to two longtime and trusted bureaucrats, the UAW bureaucracy took some elementary measures to increase the vote, including sending out mailers and posting notices around union halls and factories reminding workers to vote. This resulted in an increase to 13 percent, still one of the lowest turnouts in a direct membership vote for top officers in US history. This reflected not just the continued efforts to limit the vote to the bureaucracy and its close hangers on, but also the deep alienation of workers from the entire UAW apparatus, which functions as a tool of corporate management against the interests of rank-and-file workers.

As for the Monitor, his office’s talk of conducting a meticulous and “time consuming” investigation into any aspect of this electoral farce drips with hypocrisy. Barofsky has allowed the runoff between Curry and Fain to proceed even though he has not certified the first round of voting because of the official protest by Lehman. In fact, the Monitor has not even bothered to reply to Lehman’s protest.

Fain may very well secure the presidency and along with other members of his faction take control of the majority of the UAW International Executive Board. The installation of his Members United and the UAWD factions, which are backed by the Democratic Socialists of America and other pseudo-left organizations, may lead to a change in rhetoric, but it will do nothing to improve the conditions of workers.

This is made clear by the fact that neither Fain nor any other member of his faction has said anything about the UAW

bureaucracy's betrayal of the Caterpillar workers' struggle over the last week and the undemocratic methods it employed to ram through yet another concessionary contract, which will lead to a cut in real pay for 7,000 CAT workers of 20 percent or more over the life of the six-year contract.

Nor have any of the Members United faction said anything about the rebellion of rank-and-file workers at the Dana Toledo Driveline factory against the wave of unjust firings and abusive conditions that have been carried out at the plant with the full complicity of the UAW bureaucracy.

Like Curry, Fain is a long-time bureaucrat and member of the Administrative Caucus who has spent decades selling out workers and imposing management's dictates. Despite its rhetoric about "returning power to the members," the Members United faction is just as terrified of and hostile to an insurgent movement of rank-and-file workers, which would be an existential threat to the decades-long corporatist relations the bureaucracy has enjoyed with the auto companies and the Democratic Party.

At stake in the election is which faction of the bureaucracy will have the power to distribute high-paid positions and the union's \$1.1 billion in assets. This is underscored by the revelations that UAW Local 2320 Vice President and longtime Democratic Party operative Vail Kohnert-Yount was appointed to a \$174,000 position as Assistant Director of UAW Region 9A after she gave \$25,000 in donations to Fain's campaign.

Whether Fain or Curry wins, they will do so with the support of little more than 6 percent of the membership. In reality, this would be closer to 3 percent if the more than 40,000 bureaucrats and their cronies are subtracted from the vote total.

After the arrest and conviction of top UAW officers, including two former presidents, for accepting corporate bribes and embezzling union dues, the US Justice Department, the court-appointed Monitor and the media promoted the election to revive the credibility of the UAW bureaucracy. But this effort to put a democratic face on the UAW has failed miserably, revealing that no section of the bureaucracy has any legitimacy among workers.

This has provoked serious concerns in the boardrooms of the auto corporations, which have relied on the UAW for decades to impose their dictates. This was spelled out in an editorial in the leading industry publication *Automotive News* after the first round of voting concluded in December.

"Whoever is ultimately elected to lead the UAW's negotiating teams in bargaining with General Motors, Ford Motor Co. or Stellantis will now do so without a clear mandate from their membership," the publication writes. While the victor would "represent the whole union in theory" it adds, "just as it was under the decades long rule of the union's Administrative Caucus, they will do so with the expressed support of only a small minority of the members."

Then the publication warns:

The 2023 Detroit 3 negotiations were already going to be contentious, if only because UAW members have seen their wages eroded by inflation while their counterparts at nonunion automakers received wage adjustments to make those jobs more competitive in a tightened labor market. Now the negotiations will take place with one side disadvantaged by questions of their relative legitimacy.

The UAW's first real experience with democracy in decades has been an epic disappointment, especially for those like us who hoped it would ultimately lead to real reform at one of the industry's most important institutions.

The mouthpiece of the auto executives is concerned that "one of the industry's most important institutions" will no longer be able to contain an increasingly rebellious and radicalized workforce, which is increasingly coming under the influence of socialists.

Will Lehman won nearly 5,000 votes in the first round of the election running as a socialist and champion of the international unity of the working class. This revealed the widespread support for the fight to abolish the UAW apparatus and the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor through the formation of a network of autoworker rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace.

Lehman's call to action is being realized in the formation of new centers of decision-making power by rank-and-file workers at Caterpillar, Dana and the Big Three automakers, which are being built under the direction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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