

Next UAW president will have to beat back “unreasonable expectations” of autoworkers, leaked document from Shawn Fain transition team says

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An internal memo drawn up by the transition team for Shawn Fain outlines plans if he is sworn in as expected as the next president of the United Auto Workers union. Although Fain and his Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) slate ran on a program of “No Corruption, No Concessions, No Tiers,” the transition plan makes it clear a Fain administration may lead to a change in rhetoric, but it will continue the UAW bureaucracy’s long record of imposing the dictates of big business on autoworkers.

The leak of the document to the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* earlier this week takes place as Fain maintains a narrow 505-vote lead over incumbent president Ray Curry, with the two sides fighting over the remaining 600 unresolved challenged ballots.

The lack of popular support for either candidate and the nasty fight between the two cliques over positions and assets has only further discredited the entire UAW apparatus.

At the same time, the election crisis has left the UAW without a president on the eve of the Special Bargaining Convention, set to begin March 27. This has generated worried statements by industry analysts and former UAW President Bob King that the internecine warfare has left the UAW bureaucracy too weak to beat back workers’ demands in the upcoming contracts for 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers.

The transition plan begins with similar concerns that Fain has a very narrow window—perhaps six months—to obtain some level of credibility before UAW members “become cynical/disillusioned.”

The plan was drawn up by a host of “communications” directors whose resumes include media spinning for various Democratic politicians and unions like the United Teachers Los Angeles, Service Employees International Union and the News Guild. It emphasizes the importance of “messaging,” public relations and “shared visions.”

It states: “We have to tell the story of the new UAW reformers are reviving the original vision of the UAW as a force for racial justice and rank-and-file power, we still have the power to shut down our industry and that power was sullied by past leaders, this is a new day and we are going to put an end to concessions, tiers,

protect jobs, organize the South, and make the Green New Deal a reality by unionizing the next generation of EV. We want all our messaging to reinforce a clear break from the past. This is a new UAW.”

This is only spin aimed at duping workers. This is made crystal clear in the section of the document on the “Big 3 Contract Campaign.”

The very first point states:

Unrealistic expectations can result in despair/anger.

Expectations have to match reality and where we are. We can’t set unreasonably high bargaining or organizing expectations based on enthusiasm for the slate and for reform. We need to say: we are here for the long game. Here are the objectives for this contract and the work of this contract is building to the next one...

This won’t be accomplished in 6 months. It will take years. We need to set clear, definable, and achievable goals for the contract campaign.

In other words, all the rhetoric Fain and his team used in the election campaign was nothing but a hoax. Like his predecessors and the auto bosses, Fain insists that it is totally “unreasonable” for workers to demand inflation-busting wage increases, the restoration of Cost-of-Living protections, the abolition of all tiers, the rollover of all part-time workers to full-time positions, the defense of jobs against plant closures, layoffs and unjust firings, and full pensions for active and retired workers.

But the fact is that workers are determined to fight for these and other basic rights. This has been powerfully demonstrated in the support for Will Lehman, the socialist candidate for UAW president who won nearly 5,000 votes in first round of the election, despite the deliberate effort by the UAW bureaucracy to disenfranchise voters. It is also shown in the growing numbers of workers at auto plants in Flint, Lansing, Detroit and other cities, at Caterpillar and the auto parts maker Dana Inc., who are putting

Lehman's program of transfer power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shop floor into practice by building the expanding network of rank-and-file committees.

Aware of the dangers of this growing rank-and-file rebellion, Fain's transition team outlines a plan to bring in various left-talking Democrats and union officials to provide a cover for the UAW as it moves to impose yet another concessionary contract, as it did in 2019, 2015 and countless times before.

Under the section, "Publicly forge new ties in labor movement & politics," the transition team advises:

Quickly have a public meeting with IBT President Sean O'Brien and publicly commit to support one another in coming struggles. This helps cement a narrative around the new directions of the two most important unions in the country. IBT is also critical in Big 3 strike, secure commitment of car haulers to not cross picket lines."

Referring to Bernie Sanders and Sarah Nelson, the president of the Association of Flight Attendants and a leading member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the transition team continues:

Bernie/IBT road tour. Bernie has been organizing large scale rallies with Sean O'Brien and Sara Nelson in big cities to build support for the upcoming UPS strike (see Philadelphia, Boston, etc). Bernie's people are interested in working with us to organize similar events in locations with big auto plants.

None of these people would assist autoworkers a single iota. O'Brien played a critical role in suppressing a strike by 120,000 railroad workers last year. Sanders spearheaded a bogus political maneuver in the Senate to pave the way for the bipartisan vote—which included the DSA members in Congress—to legalize the strike and impose a contract the workers had previously rejected.

In circling the wagons against the growing revolt by the rank and file, the transition plan makes it clear Fain is open to work anyone in the UAW bureaucracy, whether they opposed him or not and no matter how many bribes they took or sellout contracts they imposed. The only criteria is they get on board with the messaging about "the new UAW."

Under the section "Managing Staff," they say: "Our motto is that of the French Foreign Legion: 'once you enter the gates, your past is behind you.'"

Their willingness to take advice from colonial mercenaries may say more than they suspect. In any case, they continue: "The message mgmt should give to staff is: We don't care what people did before we took over. What we care about is that people understand what our goals are and what our expectations are."

This means while Fain might add a few members of the DSA to

his staff he will have more than enough room for Curry and the rest of the Administrative Caucus, which Fain had long been part of before he decided to run for UAW president.

If Fain becomes president, it will be after an illegitimate election that took place through the disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands of UAW members.

On Sunday, the court-appointed Monitor overseeing the election rejected Will Lehman's protest demanding a re-vote because masses of workers never received ballots to vote and never knew an election was taking place. In denying the protest, the law firms assigned to "monitor" the election (which have been paid millions of dollars in workers' dues money) said 9 percent turnout was not "low" and shrugged their shoulders at massive evidence submitted by rank-and-file workers that they were denied the right to vote. The purpose of the election was to provide the UAW with a fig leaf of legitimacy after the corruption scandal, but this has had the opposite impact.

After a fight over positions in the new administration, Chris Brooks has apparently emerged as Fain's chief strategist. Brooks is the field organizer for the Communications Workers of America-aligned NewsGuild of New York and a former staff writer for *Labor Notes* who regularly contributes to other pseudo-left and Democratic Party-aligned publications like *Jacobin*, *In These Times*, and *The Nation*.

Autoworkers face a historic battle this year. They not only face the giant corporations that are using the threats of more plant closures and layoffs to impose their plans to create a cheap labor force in the factories and new EV-related plants. They also face a fight against the Biden administration, which is employing the UAW and other unions to impose austerity and block all strikes, while it pours endless sums into new bank bailouts and preparations for catastrophic wars against Russia and China.

But years of falling real wages, intolerable working conditions and exploitation are driving autoworkers, like Los Angeles school workers, the workers in France, the UK, Sri Lanka and around the world, into mass struggle.

Workers are on a collision course with Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy, no matter what phony rhetoric they employ to cover up their treachery. New centers of power are emerging in the factories through the building of rank-and-file committees. To organize and coordinate opposition across industries and borders, autoworkers should join and build the growing network of committees, which is being led by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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