

Shawn Fain's election will not quell growing rank-and-file anger in the UAW

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United Auto Workers International Administrative Assistant Shawn Fain was sworn in as the new UAW president Sunday on the eve of the opening of the union's Special Bargaining Convention in Detroit on Monday.

The court-appointed UAW Monitor declared Fain the winner with only 483 more votes than incumbent UAW President Ray Curry. After his election, Fain said, "It is an honor of a lifetime to be elected to lead our union. And I'll never forget that the first time the members of the UAW were given the right to vote, we chose change."

The election of Fain, however, will not resolve the deep-going crisis within the UAW apparatus, characterized by bitter internal conflicts over positions and, above all, a growing rank-and-file rebellion against the apparatus as a whole.

The election itself made a mockery of democracy. Forced to have direct elections due to the massive corruption scandal that engulfed the apparatus, the UAW bureaucracy responded by deliberately suppressing the vote, as exhaustively documented in a protest filed by UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman in December.

The campaign by the apparatus to prevent workers from even knowing there was an election was motivated in particular by the fact that in the first round, Lehman, a rank-and-file autoworker, won a powerful hearing for his campaign to abolish the apparatus and transfer power to the rank and file.

The electoral farce, which resulted in a turnout of only 9 percent, was defended by the entire apparatus, along with the Biden administration and the court-appointed Monitor, which only responded to Lehman's protest last week, three months after it was submitted.

After succeeding in removing opposition candidates in the first round, the UAW made some effort to make the election known in the second round. However, turnout was only marginally higher, at 12 percent. This expressed above all the widespread hostility of workers to the entire UAW apparatus.

In the end, Fain was elected with the votes of only 6

percent of the 1.1 million active and retired UAW members who were eligible to vote. If the thousands of union bureaucrats and their cronies are subtracted, the percentage of rank-and-file workers who cast ballots for Fain is closer to 3 percent. From here on in Fain will be known as "president three percent."

The declaration of the winner of the UAW election was delayed by weeks as the Curry and Fain cliques of the UAW apparatus challenged the eligibility of voters in a bitter fight over the distribution of positions and the union's \$1.1 billion in assets.

But Curry finally relented due to the pressure of the auto corporations, the media and the political establishment. The ruling class was anxious to wrap up the election and put in place a leadership that can be relied upon to carry through the massive cuts that are required to deal with the crisis of American capitalism and the militarization of labor required to wage war against Russia and China.

Fain has already been given his marching orders by the corporations. Stellantis, which has just "indefinitely idled" a plant in Belvidere, Illinois and has threatened more plant closures, congratulated Fain on his win "in a historic election" and said it looked forward to working "on issues that will further contribute to our mutual success while securing Stellantis' position in this highly competitive market." General Motors, which has embarked on a \$2 billion cost-cutting drive, said it is "committed to building a working relationship based on trust and mutual respect, operating in the best interest of our employees and stakeholders."

Fain ran on a program of "No concessions, no tiers, no corruption." But a leaked document from his transition team warned about the "unreasonable expectations" of the rank and file and made it clear that 150,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers who face a contract battle this summer will get nothing from the new UAW leader. "This won't be accomplished in 6 months. It will take years," the strategy document said. "We can't set unreasonably high bargaining or organizing expectations based on enthusiasm for the slate

and for reform.”

Art Wheaton, a labor expert at Cornell University, told *Automotive News*, “It will be somewhat of a rude awakening for those who elected him when he will most likely be unable to deliver on all of his promises.”

The ruling class has long relied upon and financially propped up the UAW bureaucracy to suppress resistance to the historic reversal in the social position of the working class in the United States. In the face of the globalization of capitalist production, the UAW and all the nationally based, pro-capitalist unions around the world abandoned any resistance to the onslaught on the jobs, wages and conditions of workers.

The program of the UAW apparatus, whether under Curry or now Fain, is corporatism, i.e., unrestrained collaboration with management and Democratic and Republicans alike to boost the competitiveness and profits of American capitalism. Through various corporatist schemes beginning in the late 1970s and 1980s, the UAW bureaucracy completely “decoupled” itself from the workers it claimed to represent, and its assets rose to \$1.1 billion even as UAW membership fell by more than two-thirds and workers suffered decades of eroding wages and conditions.

The integration of the union apparatus with the state is a central aim of the Biden administration as it seeks to suppress the class struggle and subordinate the working class to the escalating war against Russia and the plans for war against China.

Fain is not the expression of a rank-and-file revolt against the apparatus. Rather, he is the defensive reaction of the apparatus and the ruling class to a growing movement from below.

Fain rose to the top of the UAW apparatus by agreeing to concession after concession. In 2009, when the Obama administration demanded the halving of wages for all new-hires during the bankruptcy restructuring of GM and Chrysler, Fain told the *Kokomo Tribune*, “It was hard to swallow the cuts, but we have to preserve jobs and the future. We’re not happy about it, but you have to do what you have to do.”

Fain also has the closest ties to the Democratic Party and the capitalist state. His staff includes highly paid union and Democratic Party staffers who are members of or aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which is a faction of the Democratic Party. According to the leaked transition document, Fain plans to use the services of Bernie Sanders, Teamsters President Sean O’Brien and Association of Flight Attendants President and DSA leader Sara Nelson to provide him with a “left” cover as he beats back the “unreasonable expectations” of autoworkers this September.

But the adoption of phony rhetoric about the “new UAW”

will not hold back the autoworkers, who are determined to win inflation-busting wage increases, the restoration of Cost of Living (COLA) protection, the elimination of tiers, the rollover of all temps to full-time positions, full pensions and medical benefits for active and retired workers, and an end to plant closings, layoffs and unjust firings.

Far more significant than the elevation of Fain to president of the UAW was a meeting Sunday afternoon of dozens of autoworkers from Detroit, Ohio, Illinois and other states from the Big Three, Dana, Caterpillar and other companies to establish a network of autoworker rank-and-file committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

At the conclusion of the meeting, the workers adopted a resolution that states, in part:

The 5,000 votes received by Will Lehman in the first round of the UAW elections, despite systematic voter suppression, express the broad and growing support for this fight in the rank and file. The real struggle for democracy in the union lies ahead. The reshuffling of positions among bureaucrats in Solidarity House changes nothing. 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 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 organization of the rank-and-file rebellion against the corporatist UAW apparatus will take place through the building of new centers of decision-making power in the factories and the global unification and coordination of the struggles of the working class through the building of the IWA-RFC.



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