

Shawn Fain administration continues UAW's undemocratic ban on WSWS

Our reporters
28 March 2023

The UAW Public Relations Department denied requests from the *World Socialist Web Site* for credentials to cover this week's UAW Special Bargaining Convention in Detroit. Although the union is now run by Shawn Fain and his "Members United" faction, the UAW is maintaining the ban on the WSWS that was first imposed by Fain's predecessors.

The action is a violation not only of the free press rights of the WSWS but the rights of thousands of autoworkers who regularly read the WSWS for information necessary for their struggles. The UAW apparatus fears the growing militancy of rank-and-file workers and any exposure or criticism of its collusion with the corporations.

On Monday morning, WSWS Labor Editor Jerry White and other WSWS reporters checked into the UAW media center and were informed that the WSWS was not on the list of "credentialed media." White told UAW International Representative Frank Gates that the WSWS had sent a request for credentials to Sandra Engle, who is listed on the union's web site as the contact person for all media inquiries, but had not received a reply. Gates replied that Engle had "retired" from her post as PR director on Saturday, apparently shortly after Fain was officially declared the winner.

The two reporters requested that Gates ask the new PR director to grant the WSWS credentials to cover the event. Shortly afterwards, he returned, informing them, "Your name is not on the list. I just checked with my boss, so we will not be credentialing you."

The WSWS reporters asked what grounds the PR department was using to exclude a publication that is followed and supported by tens of thousands of autoworkers. The WSWS and its predecessor in the US, the *Bulletin* newspaper, they explained, had routinely covered UAW conventions. This was only stopped

under the administrations of Dennis Williams and Gary Jones, two previous UAW presidents who have been convicted for embezzling dues money.

The reporters asked Gates for the name of the new PR director so the WSWS could email him or her with a formal protest of this censorship. Gates replied, "I checked with my boss, you can send your email to whoever you sent it before." This made no sense, White said, since Engle had retired two days before the convention started. Refusing to divulge any names, Gates repeated, "My current boss said not to credential you."

While this was happening, reporters and photographers from Detroit's WDIV-TV, WWJ Radio and other news outlets walked in and out of the public relations department. When the WSWS reporters asked why the WSWS was being excluded while Detroit and national corporate media like the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* were being issued credentials, Gates just repeated, "You didn't make the list." According to the UAW's Labor Department filing, Gates made \$132,000 in salary in 2021 as a "Public Relations Rep" on the UAW International staff.

In July 2022, the WSWS was denied credentials to cover the UAW's 38th Constitutional Convention when the union's PR department was run by Sandra Engle. Engle was appointed Director of Public Relations and Strategic Campaigns in February 2022, after serving as a staff employee of the UAW International for twenty years and pocketing \$151,088 in salary in 2021 as a "Top Administrative Assistant."

In November 2022, Engle gave a legal declaration to the US District Court as part of the UAW bureaucracy's efforts to throw out the lawsuit filed by Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker who ran in the

first round of the election, to oppose the disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands of UAW members.

The statements of Engle—who oversaw the UAW web site, UAW social media and *Solidarity Magazine*—were used by UAW lawyers to falsely claim that the UAW and the court-appointed monitor “undertook substantial and numerous efforts” to update mailing lists and “publicize the election and urge members to vote.” In fact, the refusal to update lists and inform workers about the election led to the lowest turnout in any union election in US history.

In his speech to the convention Monday night, Fain praised the electoral farce saying, “This was the first time we had the courage to give all members the right to vote on our union’s direction. Given a chance to vote, the members voted for change.” Fain, who received approximately three percent of the votes of rank-and-file workers, knows this is a lie.

As the WSWS has warned, the changing of the guard in the upper echelons of the UAW apparatus will not end the suppression of workers’ democratic rights. The effort to censor the WSWS takes place at the same time as a leaked memo of the Fain transition team warning against “unreasonable expectations” that the new administration must oppose.



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