

Shawn Fain presides over bargaining convention as UAW outlines pro-corporate agenda in Detroit

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28 March 2023

Notwithstanding the newly elected United Auto Workers president's rhetoric about "waging war" against "multibillion-dollar corporations," the reactionary and pro-corporate agenda of the UAW bureaucracy, now headed by Shawn Fain, has been on display during this week's UAW Special Bargaining Convention in Detroit.

Fain is a longtime UAW International Representative who supported years of UAW concessions as a negotiator and top officer in the UAW-Chrysler Department. His election campaign was backed by Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD), a faction of the UAW bureaucracy that includes members of the Democratic Socialists of America. UAWD-backed candidates now control the majority of the International Executive Board of the UAW.

The claim that this would lead to the "democratization" and "reform" of the union was quickly blown up as convention delegates overwhelmingly rejected or prevented a vote on one UAWD-backed resolution after the other. On Monday, a milquetoast proposal for the bargaining convention to "go on official record as supporting the fight for COLA (cost-of-living adjustments) in all UAW contracts" was voted down by 311 to 191.

On Tuesday, several other UAWD resolutions were defeated. A proposal that the UAW reject any management effort to establish separate, inferior wage and benefit tiers for workers at Big Three or joint venture electric vehicle assembly and battery plants failed to get enough delegate votes to bring it to the floor. Another defeated resolution called for "sectoral bargaining" for higher education workers so they could have pay rates based on job duties rather than title, degree, hours or funding. Also kept off the floor was a resolution calling for the UAW to make "effective membership strike preparation."

Even these tepid proposals—which were aimed at giving the UAW bureaucracy a "militant" cover—were considered to be unacceptable. The apparatus is desperate to beat back the demands of autoworkers to win inflation-busting raises

and COLA in this summer's contract fight with GM, Ford and Stellantis, along with abolishing all tiers, rolling over temps to full-time status, and fighting unjust firings, plant closures and layoffs.

A leaked memo by Fain's own transition team warned that he would confront "unreasonable expectations" from autoworkers and that he would have to convince them it would take "years" to recoup any significant losses.

The DSA is fully backing these efforts to swindle rank-and-file workers. The defeated proposal for "effective membership strike preparation," for example, urges the UAW to set up "rank-and-file Strike Preparation Committees (SPCs) in each local." These committees would have nothing to do with mobilizing the rank and file for a real fight against the corporations and the UAW bureaucracy. On the contrary, they would consist of "All members, whether rank-and-file or official leadership" and would entangle workers in an impotent "contract campaign" of "parking lot meetings, button days, informational pickets at plants and locations such as dealerships, working to rule, etc."

A leaflet circulated by UAWD supporters Tuesday pointed to the 2012 Chicago teachers strike as an example of such a "successful" contract campaign. In fact, the pseudo-left leaders of the Chicago Teachers Union betrayed that strike, opening the way to the widespread privatization of schools and the destruction of thousands of jobs.

As the WSWWS has warned, the election of Fain will not lead to the democratization of the UAW, let alone the achievement of workers' aims. On the most basic questions—the defense of capitalism, the subordination of workers to the Democratic Party, and the promotion of economic nationalism and militarism—Fain is the same as his predecessor Ray Curry.

Fain took the stage Monday night after a parade of Democratic Party politicians, including US Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters and Michigan Governor Gretchen

Whitmer. The Democrats look to the UAW to suppress opposition to soaring living costs and impose the labor discipline the Biden administration requires to wage war against Russia and China. The resolution for the Special Bargaining Convention repeats the US State Department's tropes about "ending forced labor in China" and restoring "domestic and reliable production of materials."

The UAW bureaucracy has long been complicit in the systematic lowering of industrial wages. It is significant that the resolution being adopted at the convention presents the union's labor agreement at the auto parts maker Dana, Inc. as a "shining example" of the type of "first-rate wage and benefit package" it plans to negotiate everywhere. Workers at the company have recently formed the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee to fight the sweatshop conditions and unjust firings overseen by the UAW.

Fain came to power after a bitter fight in the UAW bureaucracy over the control of high paid positions and the union's \$1.1 billion in assets. He opened his remarks Monday night with a grotesque lie about the UAW election. "You have just witnessed the four most powerful words of democracy: The people have spoken." He continued, "We as a union have given all our members the right to vote on our direction. They voted for change."

In fact, the election was a travesty of democracy. The entrenched leadership of the UAW, which opposed the direct membership vote in the first place, did everything it could to disenfranchise rank-and-file members by refusing to widely publicize the election and update mailing lists. As a result, only 9 percent of the union's 1.1 million active and retired members voted in the first round.

In the second round, turnout increased marginally, due to efforts by the apparatus to promote its two preferred candidates once they were on the ballot for president. In the end, however, Fain won after receiving the votes of less than 6 percent of eligible members, reflecting above all the enormous alienation of the rank and file from the entire apparatus. This was closer to 3 percent if the tens of thousands of union bureaucrats and their cronies are subtracted.

In his opening remarks, Fain thanked Curry for "his services," signaling to Curry's supporters that the doors are wide open for them in a Fain administration. In all their pronouncements at the convention, UAWD supporters called for "unity" with Curry's Administrative Caucus, saying this was needed to fight the "real enemy."

This "enemy" is not the corporate bosses, with whom Fain and the UAW bureaucracy have colluded with for decades. Their real enemy are the rank-and-file workers who are determined to fight for their needs, not what the corporations, the UAW bureaucracy and their pseudo-left

supporters insist is "reasonable."

The auto corporations are giving their marching orders to Fain. But looming over the entire convention are the growing demands of rank-and-file workers and the initiatives they are taking to organize the fight against both the corporations and the sabotage of the UAW bureaucracy.

This was initially shown in the widespread support for the campaign of Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW, who won nearly 5,000 votes in the first round on the basis of a program calling for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy. Lehman called for the transfer of decision-making power to workers on the shop floor through the extension of a network of rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace.

On Monday, Lehman issued a letter to the bargaining convention outlining the demands of the rank and file.

In a major step forward, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) held a meeting on Sunday attended in Detroit and online by several dozen worker delegates from rank-and-file committees in the auto and heavy equipment industries, as well as teachers and other sections of the working class.

Delegates from committees at General Motors, Stellantis (formerly Fiat-Chrysler), auto parts makers Dana and Forvia (formerly Faurecia), Mack Trucks and construction and mining equipment maker Caterpillar resolved at the meeting to affiliate with the IWA-RFC and to establish a steering committee to guide the development of a network of autoworkers rank-and-file committees in advance of the major battles workers will confront this year.



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