

“The UAW is blatantly working against the workers”: Workers outraged over latest UAW corruption revelations

Marcus Day
11 June 2024

Anger and disgust are building among rank-and-file workers following this week’s revelations of renewed corruption investigations into the United Auto Workers union’s top officials.

UAW President Shawn Fain and members of the UAW executive board are under investigation related to allegations of misuse of union funds and other forms of misconduct, according to an explosive report filed Monday by the court-appointed UAW monitor.

For months, Fain’s office has been “obstructing and interfering with” the investigation, withholding tens of thousands of documents requested by the monitor, the report states.

“The Monitor has attempted for months to garner the Union’s cooperation in gathering the information needed to conduct a full investigation,” the monitor wrote, “but the Union has effectively slowed the Monitor’s access to requested documents.”

The latest UAW monitor report marks a dramatic intensification of the crisis gripping the UAW bureaucracy, further eroding the pretensions of Fain’s administration to be carrying out “reforms,” rooting out corruption and winning major improvements for workers.

Fain and the bureaucracy he oversees are facing down an increasingly rebellious membership, further discrediting themselves and their “militant” rhetoric with each struggle they suppress and betray. This week, the UAW apparatus ordered a shutdown of the strike by tens of thousands of University of California academic workers, who walked out in an effort to halt police violence against anti-Gaza war protesters. Since the UAW ended the strike, abjectly submitting to a court injunction, police at UCLA have gone on a new rampage against demonstrators.

“Fain is a disgrace and should be thrown out”

The latest investigations by the monitor ostensibly center on competing claims of wrongdoing by Fain and other top UAW officers, including Secretary-Treasurer Margaret Mock and UAW Vice President Rich Boyer, all of whom ran on the same Members United “reform” slate in the 2022-23 UAW elections. Another member of the UAW executive board, a regional director, is also under investigation following allegations of embezzlement, but is not identified by name in the monitor’s report.

Absurdly, Fain claimed in a statement Monday that he welcomed the investigation, saying:

We encourage the monitor to investigate whatever claims are brought to their office, because we know what they’ll find: a

UAW leadership committed to serving the membership, and running a democratic union.

But many workers have diminishing patience for Fain’s assertions of pious innocence, under conditions where his opponents within the leadership are just as deeply implicated in selling out workers’ interests.

Fain and his administration came into office in March 2023 as the result of a national union election fundamentally marred by voter suppression carried out by the UAW apparatus, as detailed by Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman in a series of challenges and lawsuits over the elections. In the runoff, Fain essentially won just 3 percent of the vote of rank-and-file workers.

“Fain is a disgrace and should be thrown out,” a Mack Trucks worker and UAW member in Macungie, Pennsylvania told the WSWS. “The brothers and sisters should have a vote on it. He sold out the families of the hard-working members of the UAW!”

“Good ole UAW,” a worker at the General Motors Lansing plant noted sarcastically. “He’s probably going to go into hiding with all this investigation into the union and everything else.”

Since coming into office, Fain’s administration has imposed one sellout contract after another, forcing through below-inflation wage increases and facilitating mass layoffs among Big Three autoworkers and auto parts workers. To package and market these agreements as “historic,” Fain elevated members of the pseudo-left Democratic Socialists of America, who now staff a number of top positions in the union apparatus.

While the monitor reported that it initiated its latest investigations in February, it sought to keep the dispute private and keep workers unaware for as long as possible, conscious of the growing dissatisfaction with the UAW leadership among the rank and file. The monitor filed the status report with the court two days after the six-month window stipulated in a 2021 federal consent decree.

That agreement, reached between the UAW apparatus and the US Department of Justice, resulted from a corruption scandal that has now spanned roughly a decade and led to the conviction of more than a dozen former UAW officials, including two past union presidents, for embezzlement of workers’ dues and accepting bribes from the corporations.

A worker at the General Motors Flint, Michigan assembly plant and member of the GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee told the WSWS:

The monitor was supposedly placed in position to oversee the UAW election and all moves made inside the UAW, so no corruption would take place. However, from the very start,

beginning with the Will Lehman campaign, it is obvious the company, the UAW and monitor were working together. The monitor was just a front to convince the workers of a new, refurbished, “back-on-track union for the people.” We can see from the results of the stand-up strike that the UAW only cares about defending the profits of GM, Ford and Stellantis.

Fain: From “labor leader of the year” to now under investigation

Fain, virtually unknown among rank-and-file workers previously, has benefited from near-universal praise in the corporate media, which has attempted to paint him as the greatest US labor leader in generations.

In this vein, just last week the *Detroit News* published an article hailing Fain as one of its “Michiganians of the Year.”

The author stated, “Arguably the most consequential UAW president since Walter Reuther, labor experts say Fain likely all but solidified a victory.”

The article quotes Fain as boasting, “We’ve put the past behind us. We’ve done 30 years of work in a year. When you bargain good contracts, you give people a reason to want to be a part of something bigger and better.”

Revealingly, Fain pointed in the article to the importance of the elevation of DSA members (dubbed “outsiders”) to top positions, before admitting that the union apparatus remained virtually unchanged under his administration.

The article notes that “most of the staff carried over from the old regime,” quoting Fain as stating, “They were held back from being inventive and creative, and we’ve just unleashed them and said, ‘Create.’”

Caterpillar worker: “Fain and the whole of the International, let’s call it what it is, ‘UAW Inc.’”

A veteran Caterpillar worker in Illinois told the WSWS: “Fain and the whole of the International—let’s call it what it is, ‘UAW Inc.’—are a nonentity to the rank-and-file worker, not only in perception, but in fact. Not ironically, so are the rank and file to them.

He continued:

The UAW is a corporation. Its business is to act as a contracted intermediary between its employer, i.e., Caterpillar, and the workforce. This could not more accurately describe the relationship of unions between their corporate masters and the actual “producer of goods,” the production, retail, medical, educational, etc. workers. The fact that the bureaucracy is corrupt is an inevitability. Its entire existence is a corruption of what unions were created to be and trusted to do. They have become so bloated by wealth and hubris it should come as a surprise to no one that the UAW president has lined his pockets while stumping for Biden, a senile, unprincipled stooge of capitalism. Talk about peas in a pod.

He added:

Fain also seems blissfully unaware that people he supposedly represents are dying in the hell holes of the companies he’s supposed to resist. The locals are absolutely no different in structure, purpose, or indifference as shown by the silence by UAW Local 974 concerning the recent horrifying death of Daulton Simmers.

“The UAW and the Biden administration are promoting wars”

The latest corruption revelations reflect a burgeoning crisis gripping not only the UAW, but also the Biden administration.

Biden has increasingly attempted to stake his “pro-labor” credentials on his close relationship with the “left”-talking Fain and the UAW apparatus. More fundamentally, however, the White House is relying on Fain and the UAW, along with its counterparts among the other union bureaucracies, to suppress the class struggle and opposition to US imperialism’s wars.

After a stage-managed process of withholding an early endorsement for Biden, Fain has emerged as a leading spokesperson for his reelection campaign and policies, asserting in a campaign earlier this year that he was ready to send the UAW membership “to war” for the president.

The GM Flint worker explained:

The UAW endorsed Biden, who had enforced a law making it illegal for railroad workers to strike. Now they say that striking is illegal if production and national security are affected. To add more, the UAW and the Biden administration are promoting wars which kill working class people throughout the world—from Gaza to Ukraine and Russia.

It is obvious that workers and students are against the genocide, but the UAW stopped a strike by academic workers at the University of California. They went on strike to oppose the repression against opponents of the genocide in Gaza.

The UAW is blatantly working against the workers’ wants and demands! Plus, there is a war against workers. The economy is worse today than it has ever been before. In the past, the people would get coupons, deals, sales and catch breaks of some kind to survive, but now every penny is pinched by the ruling class, and we, the working class, are severely struggling.

Will Lehman, the socialist Mack Trucks worker who ran for UAW president, told the WSWS that the monitor’s report was a further vindication of his warnings about the character of Fain’s administration.

“The rank-and-file movement predicted that the shuffling of figures at the top of the bureaucracy would change nothing,” Lehman said. “Fain is and was a creature of bureaucracy.”

He continued:

The monitor’s report is significant not so much because of what it says about Fain as an individual, but what it reveals about the bureaucracy as a whole. It remains a tool of the corporations and the state, carrying out its dirty work behind the backs of workers, despite Fain’s never-ending claims of “transparency.”

We can be sure that the latest monitor report is only the tip of the iceberg. I urge my brothers and sisters to draw the necessary conclusion: Form rank-and-file committees to take back power to the shop floor and abolish the pro-corporate bureaucracy.

Workers ourselves need to build the movement the UAW
bureaucracy and the state are trying to suppress, bringing together
the struggle for workers' interests with the struggle against
imperialist war and genocide.



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