

UAW Monitor cites continuing “culture of fear or retaliation” in latest status report

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In a status report filed July 12, the court-appointed UAW Monitor Neil Barofsky cited a continuing “culture of fear of retaliation” within the UAW apparatus and noted widespread reports by staff of “unethical behavior or misconduct” within the union’s leadership.

While couched in diplomatic language, the monitor paints a picture of a corrupt UAW bureaucracy riven by factional infighting and resistant to implementing even the cosmetic reforms put in place by the monitor in the wake of a corruption scandal that sent two former UAW presidents to prison.

The report follows by less than one month the ninth status report in which Barofsky complained of “lapses” in compliance with monitor’s oversight, in particular, the failure of the UAW leadership to provide thousands of requested documents related to misuse of union funds and other potentially criminal acts. On July 8, the monitor filed a motion in federal court seeking to force the UAW to hand over documents he had requested. The monitor asserted in the court filing that the UAW’s stonewalling made his office “unable to effectively carry out his responsibility to ‘remove fraud, corruption, illegal behavior, dishonesty, and unethical practices from the UAW.’”

The monitor’s most recent filing cites the results of a “cultural assessment” conducted by a third-party internal audit that surveyed hundreds of UAW staff. It notes, “of the approximately 100 Union staff who reported that they witnessed unethical behavior or misconduct during the 12 months prior to the survey, over 30 percent said that they did not report the misconduct they witnessed. All survey participants were asked why they would not report misconduct if they saw it, and, in response, over 40 percent of respondents said that they would decline to report out of fear of retaliation. Calls to the Monitor’s Hotline have independently and repeatedly echoed these same concerns.”

Among the allegations the monitor is investigating are instances of retaliation against UAW Secretary Treasurer Margaret Mock and UAW Vice President Rich Boyer, the latter was removed by Fain as head of the union’s Stellantis department. Boyer alleges that Fain asked for favors for his “domestic partner and her sister that would have violated the UAW Ethical Practices Codes’ Financial Practices.” Fain’s fiancée works at the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center

(NTC). Fain previously was a co-director of the NTC, which has served for decades as a conduit for hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate cash into UAW coffers.

The unseemly faction fight within the UAW leadership, along with allegations and counter-allegations of corrupt practices, comes as anger among rank-and-file workers is boiling over the 2023 contract betrayal, as well as the UAW’s endorsement of “Genocide Joe” Biden. Last month, the union apparatus was barely able to contain a rebellion by 48,000 UAW academic workers in California who staged a political strike against the Gaza genocide and the brutal suppression of campus protests.

At the same time, a federal judge recently ruled in favor of socialist rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman in his lawsuit against voter suppression in the sham 2022-23 election, which brought Fain to power. Both the monitor and the US Department of Labor had sided with the UAW bureaucracy in attempting to block Lehman’s complaint from being considered on its merits.

In a footnote to his report, Barofsky acknowledged that the “union’s record keeping practices were subject to several challenges by union members,” in an oblique reference to Lehman’s charges that the UAW refused to update members’ mailing addresses so they could receive ballots to vote in the election. This was part of Lehman’s detailed complaint that the UAW did as little as possible to inform members during the first-ever direct elections of top union officers.

Barofsky seeks to dismiss Lehman’s complaints by citing the Department of Labor’s whitewash of the UAW bureaucracy, which was ridiculed by Judge David Lawson as “arbitrary and capricious” before the UAW Monitor released his latest report.

While pointing to a culture of fear and retaliation among bureaucrats within the UAW apparatus, the monitor’s report predictably says nothing about the overt lies and intimidation tactics used by the bureaucracy to ram through the 2023 Big Three agreement and other sellout contracts. This included promoting false claims that the supposed “record” contract, which contained pay raises that did not even keep pace with inflation, guaranteed the promotion of temporary workers with more than nine months experience to full-time work. In fact, Stellantis and other auto companies started mass firings and layoffs shortly after the contracts were signed.

Fain removed Boyer for “dereliction of duty,” alleging that he agreed to separate concessions, which have undermined the jobs and conditions of Stellantis workers. Boyer shot back with a widely circulated internal memo revealing that Fain and other executive board members were fully aware that the promises he and Fain made to temp workers to sell the contract were lies.

Nor did the monitor note the strong-arm tactics the UAW used to force through the contract at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania. Striking workers were told by UAW leaders that they would be replaced by scabs and abandoned to their fate if they did not vote to ratify a sellout deal they had previously rejected.

The continuing revelations of UAW corruption make more urgent than ever the call by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) for new UAW elections under the control of the rank and file. The aim of this would be to throw out the corrupt leadership and implement a radically new course aimed at putting power in the hands of the rank and file and abolishing the bureaucracy. Rank-and-file workers should also demand access for independent review of all the concealed UAW documents.

Referring to the recent moves by Fain to strip Mock and Boyer of key duties, the monitor wrote, “Specifically, reports to the Monitor’s Hotline from Union staff have cited the actions taken against the Secretary-Treasurer and Vice President as driving retaliation fears that reporting alleged abuses might lead to retribution from the President’s Office.” He continued, “Given the fragility of the Union’s cultural perception of retaliation, whether they were appropriate or not, how these recent acts are perceived by the Union’s staff must be taken into account when tackling this persistent cultural challenge.”

The monitor also pointed to the decision by Fain to take over duties such as procurement, formerly under Secretary-Treasurer Mock’s office. He cautioned the changes “risk diluting the role of the Secretary-Treasurer as a potential independent check on actions that pertain to financial approvals and oversight of expenditures.” He added, “The Union must tread carefully in removing potential checks and balances on authority—especially those that concern financial matters—given the Union’s history of financial corruption, the cultural concerns still present at the Union, and the relative nascency of its compliance program.”

The monitor’s report also recited a list of areas where the UAW was delaying implementing reforms that it had pledged to implement. For example, Barofsky said that little had been done to implement the UAW’s new conference and events expense policy. He cautions, “In prior reports, the Monitor highlighted the need for additional oversight and scrutiny of Union conference and event expenses given the historical abuses of conferences by former Union Leaders.”

In addition to the above, the monitor cited the union’s foot-dragging on establishing controls over the procurement and vendor selection process, noting the record of union officials enriching themselves through kickbacks on union-branded

merchandise. He also expressed frustration that little had been done on setting up procedures to reverse the UAW’s notorious practice of nepotism and cronyism in hiring.

All of this only vindicates the warning by Lehman that the replacement of one bureaucrat with another would do nothing to end the corrupt, pro-company character of the UAW apparatus or empower the rank and file. Only the formation of new democratically controlled rank-and-file committees can transfer power to workers on the shop floor.

The deepening crisis of the UAW apparatus takes places alongside the mounting turmoil in the Democratic Party after Biden’s disastrous debate performance against Donald Trump. Biden, who styles himself the most “pro-union” president in US history and who recently called the AFL-CIO his “domestic NATO,” has been endorsed by the UAW apparatus, and Fain has been one of his most loyal promoters. However, with the Democratic campaign in freefall, a Reuters report cites a source that claims the UAW leadership met last week to discuss concerns about Biden’s re-election chances and is “considering its next options.”

Whatever the truth of these assertions, the fact is that the UAW apparatus and the Democratic Party are deeply discredited in the eyes of workers for facilitating the Israeli genocide against Palestinians, supporting the ongoing US-backed proxy war in Ukraine against Russia and enforcing declining living standards and jobs cuts at home.

Whatever the outcome of the November elections, workers face an existential fight against the destruction of living standards and democratic rights at home and the threat of global war. It is crucial that workers take the measure of the UAW bureaucracy and prepare a rebellion to overthrow the union apparatus and transfer power to the workers themselves.

Such a struggle must be based on the understanding that workers face a fight not just against this or that employer but against the entire capitalist setup, its political parties, the Democrats and Republicans, as well as the UAW servants of big business.



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