

The New York Times intervenes to defend discredited UAW President Shawn Fain

Jerry White, Tom Hall
21 September 2025

The United Auto Workers bureaucracy is facing an unprecedented crisis. Rank-and-file opposition is growing against its collusion with the corporate attack on jobs and conditions and against UAW President Shawn Fain's embrace of Trump's trade war measures and refusal to organize resistance to dictatorship.

Three years ago, Fain was hailed by the corporate media, the Biden administration, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and other pseudo-left organizations for supposedly storming UAW headquarters and driving out the old, corrupt guard. But his record in office have been a string of unbroken betrayals. Among autoworkers, Fain is spoken about with scorn and anger.

This outcome confirmed the warnings of Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman, who ran as a socialist candidate for UAW president in 2022 on a program of abolishing the union apparatus and transferring power to the shop floor through rank-and-file committees controlled by workers themselves. Lehman won nearly 5,000 votes and would have won far more if the bureaucracy had not suppressed turnout.

The crisis of the Fain administration creates the potential for a vast and rapid realignment in the working class. Support will grow for a rank-and-file rebellion to destroy the corrupt pro-management bureaucrats, coupled with a fight against inequality, exploitation and fascist dictatorship.

This terrifies the ruling class, and it is why the *New York Times*, the mouthpiece of the Democratic Party, has chosen to intervene. On September 15, it published an article, titled "Shawn Fain, Who Pledged to Reform U.A.W., Faces Internal Dissent."

The *Times* tries to shore up what it can of Fain and the bureaucracy's reputation through lies about Fain's record, while also sounding the alarm to the privileged layers which form the paper's primary audience that something dangerous is afoot. It also presents the crisis entirely in terms of internal factional infighting, giving space to Fain's bureaucratic opponents to make their case to replace him.

Times reporter Neil Boudette begins with a portrayal of Fain as a heroic reformer whose 2023 "stand-up strike" supposedly won historic gains.

Two years ago, Shawn Fain led the United Automobile Workers union through simultaneous strikes at three large carmakers, a strategy that helped produce big gains in wages and benefits for the union's members.

The *Times* is lying through its teeth. The 2023 "stand-up strike" was limited to only a handful of plants. It was coordinated with President

Biden—who spoke at a rally in support of the resulting contract, while UAW officials dragged out from the hall anti-genocide protesters—in order to contain mass opposition to decades of UAW-backed concessions.

At Stellantis alone, more than 5,000 workers have since been fired or laid off. The resulting speed up and job overloading has led to the death of two workers, Antonio Gaston and Ronald Adams Sr. The bureaucracy has worked with management to cover up their joint responsibility.

But the *Times* gives Fain space to lie about his record. "For decades, we went backwards, we made concessions," he is quoted as saying. "But we won the biggest contracts in the history of the Big Three."

Here, the "newspaper of record" is caught in an obvious contradiction. If this is true, then how could the Fain administration face significant opposition? They never give a straight answer because to do so would expose not only Fain but the entire bureaucracy.

For this reason, the *Times* also does not reference the most recent report by court-appointed union monitor Neil Barofsky, which paints a devastating picture of Fain as little more than a violent thug, like those before him. According to the report, Fain threatened to "slit the f***ing throats" of his factional opponents, launched into vulgar tirades on a regular basis and retaliated against officials who refused to authorize expenses. Earlier reports also alleged that the union was stonewalling corruption investigations by the monitor's office.

Nor does the *Times* refer to Fain's embrace of Trump's "America First" tariffs, along with many other top American union officials. Only four days before the *Times* article, Fain held a livestream reaffirming support for Trump's tariffs, while remaining silent on troop deployments to major US cities and the use of the killing of right-wing propagandist Charlie Kirk to suppress opposition.

If the *Times* mentions absolutely none of this it is because any contact with reality would cause their narrative to collapse immediately.

In its presentation of "internal dissent," the newspaper confines itself entirely to a campaign mounted by former Fain supporters to discipline or remove him from office, led by Secretary Treasurer Margaret Mock, Vice President Richard Boyer and loyal oppositionist Brian Keller.

Recently, six locals voted to approve charges against Fain, although the monitor ruled the charges were improperly filed, forcing petitioners to restart the process. Even if it goes forward, however, the decision whether to remove Fain will ultimately be made by the union's International Executive Board, not union members.

The *Times* quotes Fain loyalists citing low turnout at local meetings to discredit opposition and notes that "more than 100 people in

leadership posts at more than 50 U.A.W. locals signed a petition backing Mr. Fain.” At the same time, it quotes Keller and other “dissidents.”

The *Times* reassures its readership that opposition to Fain is limited to secondary questions and personal friction:

The dissident workers’ main complaints about Mr. Fain are rooted in internal union matters like budgets and his treatment of other union officials, rather than in grand philosophical disagreements about labor and political issues.

Those behind this campaign are not “workers,” but bureaucrats. Just as the *Times* falsely portrays Fain as the authentic voice of workers, so it tries to present his *bureaucratic* opponents as the voice of opposition from the rank-and-file. In so doing, it is preparing the grounds to present Fain’s replacements as the next great union “reform” group, should that become necessary.

Significantly, the *Times* did not cite a single rank-and-file worker on their views of Fain. Nor did it mention Will Lehman, whose program of rebellion against the apparatus the *Times* is determined to block from gaining influence.

The *Times* also reassures its readers, “Mr. Fain said the dissidents would not distract him from working to win a new contract with GE Aerospace, where 600 U.A.W. members are on strike in Ohio and Kentucky.” In other words, Fain will not let factional infighting disrupt the union’s sellout of a strike at a key defense plant, which it did on Friday.

The beginning of the article hints at the reason why the credibility of the UAW leadership is important enough for the *Times* to weigh in:

Mr. Fain was hailed by progressives and Democratic politicians like former President Joseph R. Biden Jr. who saw him as the vanguard of a new generation of labor leaders who could get more workers to sign up to join unions, reversing the long slide in the labor movement’s ranks. He campaigned for Mr. Biden and later former Vice President Kamala Harris and exchanged insults with President Trump.

In other words, the crisis of the UAW implicates the entire Democratic Party and the most powerful institutions of the American capitalist state.

Fain owes his position primarily to support from the government, not workers. He was elected in a sham vote with only 9 percent turnout—with more ballots marked “undeliverable” than actually cast. Lehman filed legal challenges against the sham vote, but both union monitor Neil Barofsky and the Department of Labor have stonewalled these efforts.

In a filing earlier this month, the Trump administration admitted that the Department of Labor has not provided the legally required explanation for its rejection of Lehman’s complaint over the anti-democratic election process.

Fain was a de facto member of the Biden government, an honored guest at state dinners and was appointed to the White House Export Council, where he played a role in managing the global affairs of American capitalism. He also was a top supporter of the war policies

of Biden and a promoter of the creation of a wartime economy.

Pseudo-left Democrats from the DSA like Jonah Furman and Brandon Mancilla entered the union’s national leadership as Fain’s top advisors, through their participation in the “Unite All Workers for Democracy” slate, which attacked Lehman’s call for the overthrow of the bureaucracy as “anti-union.”

Today, both Fain and the Democratic Party are widely hated. Both have also responded to the party’s debacle in last year’s election and Trump’s bid for dictatorship with complicity. Fain, together with another “reformer,” Teamsters head Sean O’Brien, has led a wave of union officials who are backing Trump’s “America First” tariff policies, supporting his efforts to blame foreigners for the loss of American jobs.

The DSA supports this; the *Times* refuses even to raise it. UAWD, thoroughly discredited for sitting in coalition with a fascist collaborator, voted to dissolve itself earlier this year (but many of its former members, such as Furman and Mancilla, continue to rake in six figure salaries as members of the bureaucracy).

The complete discrediting of officially sanctioned “opposition” figures like Fain is a sign that conditions are emerging for a powerful movement of the working class that can escape the stranglehold of the apparatus. “There is totally legitimate hatred of Fain and his crimes against the rank and file,” Lehman said. “But a bureaucratic maneuver will not resolve the issue or create democratic control. Only a rank-and-file rebellion to abolish the bureaucracy and transfer power to workers will.”

“The Department of Labor under both the Democrats and Republicans continues to demonstrate that it has nothing to do with defending workers’ rights and interests. It is propping up the UAW apparatus precisely because the union bureaucracy serves to suppress opposition by workers to corporate exploitation. But in doing so, they’re only exposing the pro-corporate, anti-working class role of both the union apparatus and the state even more.”

Neither the maneuvering of Fain nor the dishonesty of the *Times* can stop the coming eruption of mass opposition to inequality, dictatorship and war. The task is building rank-and-file committees to break through the bureaucratic bottleneck and consciously organize an industrial and political counter-offensive to end the threat of dictatorship, expropriate the oligarchy, and reorganize society to meet social needs, not corporate profit.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact