Department of Justice investigating UAW President Shawn Fain: The crisis of bureaucracy deepens

Jerry White
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The US Department of Justice (DOJ) has convened a federal grand jury and subpoenaed the court-appointed monitor overseeing the United Auto Workers as part of a criminal investigation into the monitor's findings that UAW President Shawn Fain "abused the authority of his office" to gain favors for his fiancée and her sister and retaliated against a UAW official for opposing it.

According to a *Bloomberg* story published Sunday, Fain was informed of the probe on June 18 by a Jenner & Block attorney representing the UAW Monitor's office, nearly a month before workers learned of its existence. Reuters confirmed the investigation after a review of internal union documents.

The DOJ launched the probe into allegations that Fain pressured Vice President Rich Boyer to secure a cash bonus benefiting his fiancée, Keesha McConaghie, an employee at the UAW-Stellantis National Training Center, and to intervene in his fiancée's sister's workers' compensation claim against Stellantis. He then allegedly retaliated against Boyer by stripping him of his duties as chief Stellantis negotiator on charges that Monitor Neil Barofsky found to be "unsupported, unfounded and exaggerated," and that "Fain knew were false when he made them."

The revelations have deepened the crisis within the UAW bureaucracy, which is facing growing rank-and-file opposition, including massive rejections of UAW-backed contracts at Nexteer, Dana and other parts suppliers. It has raised the possibility that Fain will face formal corruption charges under conditions in which a real opposition to the bureaucracy has emerged.

Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist, was nominated to run for union president during last month's UAW Constitutional Convention in Detroit on a program of abolishing the bureaucracy and transferring power to the rank-and-file workers on the shop floor.

In a July 12 statement, Fain responded to the DOJ investigation by portraying himself as a victim of false accusations by Boyer and political persecution by the UAW Monitor. Fain said he had "remained silent about the political infighting in our union over the past two years" but had now gone public "because the stakes are too high, and the membership deserves the truth."

He claimed Boyer, who is also a candidate for UAW president, had "fed the monitor false allegations" to "steal the upcoming UAW election." This was an audacious claim from the president whose retaliation against rivals in the UAW bureaucracy is well documented, including Fain's threat at a staff meeting to "slit" the "throats" of anyone who "messed" with his inner circle.

Fain's central claim is that Monitor Barofsky "has a political grudge against me because the UAW took an anti-war stance about what was happening in Gaza." This is a myth. The actual incident Fain is referring to was a confrontation in February 2024 in which Barofsky forwarded Fain a letter from the Anti-Defamation League critical of a symbolic and toothless ceasefire resolution adopted by the UAW.

This claim of persecution of Fain is being amplified by *Labor Notes*, *Jacobin* and the pseudo-left media as evidence that a two-year federal corruption investigation is driven by pro-Zionist animus against a fearless champion of Palestinian solidarity.

Fain's real attitude was on display during the January 2024 UAW Community Action Program (CAP) conference, when the apparatus assembled to endorse Joe Biden for re-election. Three UAW delegates stood up and chanted "Ceasefire now!" calling for an end to Israel's genocide in Gaza. They were dragged out of the hall by Capitol police as Fain stood by and watched.

During the University of California strike in the spring of 2024, tens of thousands of academic workers walked out to oppose the US-backed genocide in Gaza and police crackdowns on campus protests. The UAW bureaucracy repeatedly delayed calling the strike despite overwhelming

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votes for action, then limited it to just 2,000 workers at a single campus.

Fain says he has retained a law firm to "fight against the Monitor's trumped-up claims," asserting, "This is what happens when you go against corporate America and their allies, and I'm not going to be intimidated or harassed out of serving our membership."

Far from persecuting Fain, Barofsky has gone out of his way to prop him up. The court-appointed Monitor issued his charges against Fain in a status report filed with U.S. District Judge David Lawson on June 25, one week after the convention concluded. Fain, like the other candidates, was required to attest that he had not engaged in fraudulent or corrupt conduct—something the Monitor knew was untrue and could be the basis for disqualifying him from the election.

Barofsky also oversaw the 2022-23 UAW elections, the first direct membership vote in UAW history, and ignored the mountain of evidence presented by Lehman of the deliberate voter disenfranchisement, which led to Fain being elected with the votes of only 6 percent of the membership.

The federal oversight of the UAW—which began after the exposure that top UAW bureaucrats were taking corporate bribes and embezzling dues money—was never designed to produce genuine democratic accountability. Its aim was only to manage the apparatus's public image and install a leadership acceptable to the corporations and the capitalist state.

The faction fight between Fain, Boyer and Secretary-Treasurer Margaret Mock does not reflect any principled differences. It is a struggle over positions and access to vast resources—the UAW's $1.3 billion strike fund, its billion-dollar asset portfolio, its network of retiree healthcare funds and training centers, and the lavish careers they sustain for a bloated layer of overpaid officials. All parties are equally implicated in the betrayal of UAW members.

This bureaucratic infighting has been brought to a boil by something the Monitor's reports deliberately never mention: a growing revolt of the rank and file against the apparatus as a whole. Fain has sought to use Boyer as a scapegoat for the sellout of Stellantis workers which the entire bureaucracy is responsible for. In a June 2024 letter, Boyer admitted that both he and Fain and his entire staff were aware that the claim that all temporary workers—known as "supplemental employees" (SEs) at Stellantis—would be converted to full-time under the 2023 agreement was a lie.

As head of the UAW Independents, Parts and Suppliers (IPS) division, Boyer also bears direct responsibility for a wave of sellouts that has produced an unprecedented rebellion. Nexteer workers in Saginaw rejected three UAW-backed contracts by overwhelming margins before the union narrowly rammed the fourth agreement through by holding the vote inside the factory, falsely claiming workers who had not finished their 90-day probationary period would qualify for a $3,000 signing bonus.

Dana workers in Toledo, Ohio; Warren, Michigan; and Paris, Tennessee massively rejected a tentative agreement which Boyer claimed included "healthy wage increases" though starting pay is $20 an hour, and new workers will top out at $25 an hour after four years.

The bureaucracy also ended the 10-day strike and rushed through an American Axle sellout on the eve of the convention while giving workers less than 48 hours to read a 118-page contract and threatening permanent replacement if they rejected it.

In other words, Boyer's record is indistinguishable from every other section of the apparatus and one that exposes his posture as Fain's wronged opponent as entirely fraudulent.

The WSWS warned from the outset that Fain's election would change nothing of substance. When he was sworn in as president in March 2023, the WSWS wrote, "Fain is not the expression of rank-and-file revolt against the UAW apparatus. Rather, he is the defensive reaction of the apparatus and the ruling class to a growing movement from below."

Every development since—the Stellantis temps betrayal, the auto parts revolts, the suppression of defense industry strikes, the violent ejection of anti-genocide delegates from the UAW's own conference hall, the blocking of UC and Columbia student strikes—has confirmed that verdict.

Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and socialist, was nominated for UAW president for a second consecutive time at the 2026 Convention, on a program to abolish the bureaucracy and transfer power directly to workers on the shop floor. What the Fain scandal demonstrates is what Lehman told workers at the outset of his campaign: "This bureaucracy can't be reformed. It must be abolished."

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