Rank-and-file candidate for UAW president calls for abolition of union bureaucracy as criminal probe of Shawn Fain continues

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Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker in Macungie, Pennsylvania running for UAW president, issued a statement this week on the federal criminal investigation into UAW President Shawn Fain.

"What the investigation confirms is what many of you have long known and what my campaign has said since I first ran for this office," Lehman wrote in a statement posted on his website. "This bureaucracy cannot be reformed. It must be abolished, and power must be transferred to workers on the shop floor. That is what I am running for UAW president to do."

Speaking to workers, Lehman wrote, "Disgust with corruption is not enough. The question is: What are we going to do about it? It is not enough to complain. We must act."

As the WSWS reported Monday, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has convened a federal grand jury and subpoenaed the court-appointed Monitor overseeing the UAW. Monitor Neil Barofsky found that Fain "abused the authority of his office" to secure a cash bonus for his fiancée, Keesha McConaghie, an employee at the UAW-Stellantis National Training Center, and to intervene in her sister's workers' compensation claim against Stellantis. When Vice President Rich Boyer would not cooperate, Fain allegedly retaliated by stripping him of his duties as chief Stellantis negotiator, based on charges Fain "knew were false when he made them," according to the report the Monitor filed in federal court on June 25.

An earlier report documented the systematic effort to cover up the retaliation campaign against Fain's executive board rivals. At least 123 text messages directly related to the purges, including the drive to strip Secretary-Treasurer Margaret Mock of her assignments, were deleted from Fain's phone during the precise periods under investigation. Barofsky found the deletions "followed a pattern of selective deletion rather than wholesale removal of conversation threads" and that no credible explanation was offered.

Fain suggested that someone else might have accessed his phone, telling investigators, "I leave my phones in my desk a lot in my office," and claiming he could not remember when he had put a passcode on his device. "None of these explanations match the record of deletion here," Barofsky wrote. Investigators recovered many of the destroyed messages from the phones of other UAW officials, exposing a scheme to falsify allegations against Mock that forced the resignation of Fain's chief of staff Chris Brooks and the discipline of Communications Director Jonah Furman—both members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).

Fain has now retained two former federal prosecutors who specialize in defending corporate executives against fraud and bribery charges, the *Detroit News* reported earlier this week. Attorneys Robert Zink and Ben O'Neil work in the Washington D.C. office of Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, an elite white-collar defense firm whose clients include the world's richest man, Elon Musk, and former New York City Mayor Eric Adams.

A UAW spokesperson claimed no union dues would be used for Fain's defense but did not explain who would cover the retainers charged by a firm of Quinn Emanuel's caliber.

In his statement, Lehman noted that Fain, "like a cornered rat," now claims to have evidence that Boyer and Mock "were pulling the same tricks to get family

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members jobs and favors," while admitting he "stayed quiet" because, in Fain's words, it "doesn't help our union to have these fights out in public." Fain claims he blocked the hiring of Mock's son and of Boyer's grandson.

"If these charges are true, no rank-and-file worker will be surprised," Lehman wrote. "But one thing is certain: All of it was hidden from the membership, whose dues are stolen to provide perks and positions to hidden relatives."

Lehman warned workers against any illusion that Fain's factional opponents represent a principled opposition. Boyer is running against Fain for the UAW presidency and Mock for reelection as UAW Secretary-Treasurer. Lehman stated that both were part of Fain's own slate in 2022, "standing right beside him when he called the bogus 'Stand Up' strike and hailed the 2023 contracts as 'historic victories.'" Boyer "sold out Stellantis workers," Lehman wrote, "and Fain and his staff signed off on the rotten deal that threw thousands of temporary workers into the streets, punished workers for taking time off, and led to the deaths of Antonio Gaston and Ronald Adams Sr."

As head of the UAW's auto parts division, Boyer compiled his own record of betrayals. "Dana workers in Toledo, Warren and Paris, Tennessee massively rejected a deal he called a 'win,' despite poverty-level starting pay," Lehman noted. "Nexteer workers in Saginaw voted down three UAW-backed contracts by overwhelming margins before the union rammed through a fourth."

Behind the mutual recriminations lies a struggle over the spoils of office, Lehman said. "With the election pending, the bureaucrats are fighting over who controls the $1.3 billion strike fund, the billion-dollar asset portfolio, and the network of retiree healthcare funds and training centers that sustain lavish salaries and careers for a bloated layer of officials. Neither faction has the interests of workers in mind."

In his own July 12 statement, Fain postured as a martyr, declaring, "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." He claims the Monitor is persecuting him over the UAW's stance on Gaza.

"These claims deserve nothing but contempt," Lehman responded. "When anti-genocide delegates chanted 'Ceasefire now' at the conference he assembled to endorse Joe Biden, the man supplying Israel the bombs, Fain watched as Secret Service agents and UAW thugs dragged them out."

Far from defying the war machine, "the UAW bureaucracy strangled the University of California strike and blocked action at Columbia" in defense of protesting students, Lehman continued. "When GE Aerospace workers struck a major defense contractor supplying weapons to Israel, Fain shut them down within weeks."

Lehman also castigated the Monitor, saying he was installed not to defend the democratic rights of UAW members but to refurbish the image of the union bureaucracy. The Monitor, he said, "knew about Fain's conduct before the convention, sat on his findings until Fain was already nominated, and let stand Fain's sworn certification that he had not engaged in corrupt conduct, which Barofsky knew was a lie." Lehman continued, "This is the same monitor who signed off on the 2022-23 elections, rejected my documented evidence of deliberate voter disenfranchisement, and blessed an outcome in which Fain won with the votes of just 6 percent of the membership."

Lehman insisted that workers' anger over the scandal must be transformed into organized action. "I am not running for UAW president to reach the top of the garbage heap at Solidarity House," he wrote. "This campaign is not about replacing one official with another. It is about abolishing the bureaucracy and transferring power to the rank and file."

The growing opposition of the rank and file to every faction of the bureaucracy is already expressed in the mass rejection of UAW-backed contracts and in overwhelming strike votes. "What that fighting spirit needs is organization: rank-and-file committees in every plant, independent of the apparatus and answerable only to you," Lehman concluded.

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