“Shawn Fain, the president of the International union, has tanks, grenades, AK-47s. He has all the arsenal”—Margaret Mock

UAW secretary-treasurer debate lays bare sharp conflicts in the apparatus over administration of vast union assets

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The July 23 UAW Monitor candidate forum for secretary-treasurer underscored the absence of any substantive policy differences among the candidates. Despite bitter factional conflicts within the union leadership, incumbent Margaret Mock, Region 4 Director Brandon Campbell—a member of UAW President Shawn Fain’s UAW United slate—and UAW Local 869 Financial Secretary Roc Ciers all upheld the corporatist, pro-war orientation of the UAW apparatus as a whole.

The secretary-treasurer has historically been the second most powerful office in the UAW and has often served as a stepping stone to the presidency. The office oversees more than $1.2 billion in union assets, including the massive strike fund and roughly $860 million in investments.

Beyond its reported assets, the UAW apparatus also controls the $63 billion Retiree Health Care Trust Fund, which includes an investment portfolio valued at approximately $58 billion, according to recent financial filings. Investment income in 2024 exceeded retiree benefit payments and administrative expenses, producing a net income of more than $202 million.

Control over these financial resources has long been intertwined with corruption at the highest levels of the union bureaucracy. Former Secretary-Treasurer Dennis Williams, who later became UAW president, held the office while senior officials, including future UAW President Gary Jones, were looting millions of dollars in members’ dues through kickbacks, fraudulent expense accounts and other criminal schemes. Williams himself used union funds to finance a lavish lifestyle and joined Jones and other officials in a scheme to submit fraudulent expense vouchers. Williams, Jones and numerous other senior UAW officials were eventually convicted and sentenced to prison.

The federal consent decree imposed following the corruption scandal was intended to prevent such a blatant recurrence—and the danger of full-scale rank-and-file revolt—by establishing some financial controls and oversight. The significance of these limited restrictions, and the bureaucracy’s utter hostility toward them, formed an important backdrop to the secretary-treasurer debate.

The election also takes place in the shadow of the UAW Monitor’s findings that President Shawn Fain and his inner circle retaliated against Mock after she challenged their handling of union finances. The Monitor concluded that the charges used to justify stripping Mock of most of her constitutional responsibilities were fabricated.

The Monitor’s Thirteenth Status Report, released in November 2025, described a “toxic culture of division and retaliation at the highest levels of the organization,” concluding that the union “does not appear to be on the path to sustainable cultural reform.”

Far from demonstrating the success of the so-called “UAW reform” movement, the Monitor’s findings exposed an apparatus that continues to rely on anti-democratic and retaliatory methods to silence internal opponents. The report demonstrated that the bureaucracy remains impervious to even a cosmetic facelift.

One of the principal issues cited by Fain in stripping Mock of her duties was her refusal to immediately approve a $500,000 no-bid contract for billboards and other advertising connected with the UAW organizing campaign at Volkswagen in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

According to the UAW Monitor, Mock questioned whether the contract complied with the procurement rules established under the federal consent decree following the corruption scandal. Those rules generally required competitive bidding for major expenditures unless a sole-source exception could be justified. Given that the abuse of no-bid contracts had figured prominently in the criminal prosecutions that sent several of her predecessors to prison, Mock said it was her responsibility as secretary-treasurer to ensure the union’s financial procedures were being followed.

The Monitor did not conclude that Mock had acted improperly by raising those questions. Rather, he found that disputes over procurement and financial oversight became part of a broader campaign by Fain and his supporters to strip Mock of her authority and isolate her within the administration.

Further details surrounding the no-bid contract emerged in a July 15 investigative article published by *PayDay Report*, based on leaked UAW International Executive Board transcripts. According to the report, the billboard contract was awarded to Conexion, a communications firm founded by Adrian Saenz, who previously served as Director of Public Engagement in the Biden White House. The firm was reportedly staffed largely by Washington-based Democratic Party operatives.

According to *PayDay Report*, Mock’s refusal to sanction the no-bid contract apparently angered Fain’s Communications Director Jonah Furman. Furman, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, former *Labor Notes* columnist and national labor organizer for the Bernie Sanders 2020 campaign, was also angered by Mock’s failure to “approve a no-bid contract for Feldman Strategies, a communication firm founded by DC political operative Andrew Feldman.”

Given the close integration of the UAW apparatus with the Democratic

Party—and Fain's particularly close relationship with the Biden administration, whose support he repeatedly promoted—Mock's refusal to immediately sign off on the no-bid contracts disrupted at least temporarily some of the continuous flow of workers' dues money to Democratic Party operatives closely connected to the White House.

The conflict followed the same pattern identified elsewhere by the UAW Monitor. In a separate case, Fain and his allies brought charges against UAW Vice President Rich Boyer, whom the Monitor likewise concluded had been improperly targeted. Fain used Boyer as a scapegoat amid mounting rank-and-file anger following the 2023 "Stand Up Strike," in which most UAW members were never called out. The subsequent contract settlement—signed by Boyer and Fain's entire staff—imposed real wage cuts through below-inflation increases, while paving the way for mass layoffs and the dismissal of thousands of temporary workers, who had been falsely promised full-time employment.

Against this backdrop, the secretary-treasurer forum revealed that despite the intense and bitter factional struggle inside the apparatus, there are no essential political differences among the contending factions.

In her opening statement, Mock avoided any criticism of either the Fain administration or the UAW apparatus. Instead, she emphasized her personal commitment to "integrity, transparency and accountability" in managing members' "sacred dues dollars." She stated that she had enforced federal compliance rules and had "questioned spending when necessary."

Significantly, Mock made no reference to the UAW Monitor's findings that she had been unjustly stripped of her duties, nor did she criticize Fain for the retaliation documented in the Monitor's reports.

Campbell and Ciers, by contrast, directed virtually all of their criticism at Mock.

Campbell declared that "we can do better," accusing Mock of failing to produce a budget or maintain updated membership lists, responsibilities traditionally assigned to the secretary-treasurer. Ciers emphasized his accounting background, degrees from Wayne State University and Central Michigan University and experience in financial management.

Both candidates repeated the claim that Mock's handling of strike fund investments had cost the union approximately $80 million in investment income—a charge that the UAW Monitor had previously discredited.

The resort to lies and insinuation is not new for Campbell. At a rally for striking CNH workers in December 2022, Campbell claimed that a statement issued by Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman who was running for UAW president calling for support for the CNH workers was prohibited by the UAW election rules. Campbell attempted to intimidate Lehman's supporters by taking photos of them, which was an actual violation of the UAW election rules.

Campbell boasted that he was a creature of the UAW apparatus, saying, "I grew up in this union. The first convention I went to was in 1983. I was in Black Lake for family scholarship before I even graduated from junior high school."

Neither Mock nor the other candidates addressed the broader significance of the strike fund or the bureaucracy's financial interest in limiting strikes. Under the UAW Constitution, money may be transferred from the strike fund to the union's general treasury, which finances officer salaries and the day-to-day operations of the apparatus, provided the strike fund remains above a specified threshold. Over the years, the percentage of investment income eligible for transfer has quietly been increased until it now stands at 100 percent, giving the International Executive Board broad discretion over those funds.

Conserving and growing the strike fund therefore provides the bureaucracy with a direct financial incentive to avoid strikes or shut them down quickly when they do occur.

Likewise, none of the candidates acknowledged that outdated membership lists, a key duty of the secretary-treasurer, contributed to the turnout of only 9 percent in the 2022 direct election of top UAW officers, nor did they explain what concrete measures, if any, are being taken to prevent a repetition in the 2026 election.

The sharpest exchange of the forum came after moderator and former *New York Times* labor reporter Steven Greenhouse asked Campbell and Ciers to respond to the UAW Monitor's findings that Fain's administration had engaged in misconduct in its treatment of Mock.

Campbell dismissed the question outright. "I am not going to be distracted by those Monitor reports," he said, before immediately returning to his attacks on Mock. Ciers likewise evaded the question.

Under relentless attack throughout the debate, Mock finally responded.

"Those are lies. Scratch a liar, find a thief," she declared. Referring to her disputes with Fain over financial oversight, she asked, "What should I do when the president of the international union says, 'Sign the fucking checks'? That's my only job?"

In one of the debate's most revealing moments, Mock sought to describe the real relation of power inside the UAW leadership, which functions more like a feudal monarchy than a genuine workers' organization.

"Shawn Fain, the president of the International Union, has tanks, grenades, AK-47s. He has all the arsenal. He has all the tools. What do I have? Rocks and dust."

The exchange underscored the intensity of the factional conflict within the apparatus. Yet despite the bitter personal and organizational struggle, the debate revealed no substantive political differences over the union's fundamental orientation or its relationship to management, the Democratic Party or the capitalist state.

The issue of the strike fund surfaced again when candidates were asked about the recent constitutional amendment raising the threshold for an automatic dues reduction. Mock stated that after the strike fund reached the previous $850 million trigger level, she prepared a letter informing members that the constitutional provision requiring a dues reduction had been activated. According to Mock, the UAW legal department blocked her from sending the letter.

Mock further claimed that she had opposed the constitutional amendment, pushed through by Fain and his supporters at the recent UAW Constitutional Convention in Detroit, which raised the trigger for an automatic dues reduction from $850 million to $1.3 billion. There appears to be no public record documenting her opposition, however.

Taken as a whole, the forum demonstrated that the struggle within the upper levels of the UAW bureaucracy is not a conflict over the interests of rank-and-file workers but over the control of a vast financial and institutional apparatus. While the candidates exchanged accusations over administration, accounting and internal governance, none advanced a program challenging the corporatist framework that has dominated the union for decades or addressed the growing demands of workers confronting layoffs, plant closures, concessions and war.

It underscores the importance of the call by rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman, who is running for UAW president against Fain and Boyer, for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy and the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor through the development of rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace. These committees, democratically controlled by workers, would utilize the financial resources of the UAW to sustain workers in strikes and other battles, as part of a fighting program to unite workers across plants, industries and globally in a counteroffensive against the relentless corporate assault on jobs, living standards and democratic rights.

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