

Corporate press, DSA falsify UAW election, invent “mandate” for “president 6 percent” Shawn Fain

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13 October 2026

The United Auto Workers (UAW) election, which ended last week, was a complete debacle for the apparatus. Ballots were counted for only 9.06 percent of an estimated 1.1 million eligible voters, the lowest turnout in a national union election in US history, below even the last UAW election in 2022. More than a million members did not vote.

Incumbent Shawn Fain won 68.1 percent of the votes cast for president, but given the total turnout, he was elected by only 6.1 percent of the estimated membership, about one member in 16. Even that figure includes the thousands of officials, staff and appointees whose positions depend on the apparatus.

Four years ago, a turnout of under 10 percent in the union’s first direct election was itself recognized as a crisis. Will Lehman, who ran for president then as well, documented that masses of workers never received ballots nor knew an election was taking place, and took the matter to federal court. Judge David Lawson, while dismissing the suit, conceded that the complaints “certainly are serious and should cause concern” and noted the “remarkably low turnout.”

Now, after three and a half years of an administration hailed as the transformation of the union, turnout has fallen even further.

This was not simply a record low turnout. It was a mass boycott. Voting fell in seven of the union’s nine regions. From the auto plants of the Detroit area, the historic center of the union, to the academic locals that have been the base of its recent growth, the overwhelming majority of members refused to take part.

One factor, as last time, was the failure to notify workers and their inability to get ballots.

A second factor was the onerous rules directed against Lehman, a socialist Mack Trucks worker running on a platform of abolishing the bureaucracy and replacing it with rank-and-file committees. The rules were adopted at the UAW’s 2022 convention and enforced by the federal monitor. The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) was prevented from endorsing and campaigning for him. Lehman’s campaigners were kicked out of plants with impunity while Fain and other officials campaigned openly, further reducing turnout among those

looking for a way to fight the apparatus.

But the decisive factor was the hostility of workers to the apparatus itself. They voted with their feet. They gave their verdict on not just the Fain administration but the entire apparatus, following three and a half years of betrayals, thousands of layoffs and repeated sabotage of strikes.

The corporate press is now responding with a cover-up that reaches truly absurd proportions. It is turning this vote of no confidence in the apparatus into a massive “mandate” for Fain.

The *Wall Street Journal* proclaimed an “Election Rout” for Fain. The *Detroit Free Press* called the result a “striking referendum on the popularity of Fain.” The *Guardian* announced that Fain “easily wins re-election.” *Common Dreams* put Fain’s own claim in its headline: “The Membership Has Spoken.” The pseudo-left *Labor Notes* joined the chorus, celebrating a “renewed mandate” and a “referendum on the new fighting direction.”

For the most part, these reports made no reference at all to the turnout. Those that did treated the fact that workers did not participate in this “mandate” as a minor qualification. This reflects the corporate press’s contempt for workers. What matters to them, and to the auto companies, is that their errand boy Fain, who is also being promoted as a dark-horse contender for the 2028 Democratic presidential nomination, got four more years.

The *Free Press* is right that the election was a “striking referendum,” though not in the sense it intended. In any referendum, the first question is how many took part. Every regime that stages a plebiscite looks first to the turnout, because it knows what mass abstention says about the hatred of the population toward it. In this case, the apparatus threw a party to which nobody came and then declared it a smashing success.

More is involved than just covering for Fain. By inventing mass support for the apparatus, these publications are also seeking to delegitimize all opposition to the bureaucracy and present it as the product of a handful of malcontents and wreckers. They are providing cover for the apparatus as it moves against opposition in the rank and file.

The award for cynical lying in the service of the apparatus

goes to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), whose members hold leading positions in the union bureaucracy and have served as Fain's chief advisers. Chris Brooks, Fain's former chief of staff, wrote in the DSA-aligned *Jacobin* magazine that "United Auto Workers members are overwhelmingly backing Fain and the militant direction he is taking the union."

Brooks concedes that turnout was "about 10 percent of the total number of active and retired members" and lower than in 2022. He offers, however, no explanation for this fact. If Fain has done such a great job, why did nine out of ten members refuse to take part in his re-election?

Brooks's fictitious "overwhelming" support evaporates on contact with the figures. In Regions 1 and 1A in Michigan, the center of the auto industry and the home of UAW headquarters, 26,975 ballots were counted out of more than 300,000 active and retired members.

At Harvard, where more than 4,000 graduate workers struck for 40 days in the spring, the local cast 53 ballots, effectively no more than local officials and a few of their friends. Harvard was the base of Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla, a DSA member. At Columbia, where his regional apparatus (under the direction of Mancilla) refused to authorize a strike unless graduate workers dropped their political demands, roughly 3,000 members cast just 29.

Brooks claims that Fain's opponents "wanted to return the union to the days when it was rolling over for the bosses and lacked a broader vision for what organized labor can do, even in its weakened state." This is a slander against Lehman, whose campaign the DSA and *Labor Notes* opposed, claiming his platform of abolishing the bureaucracy and transferring power to workers was "anti-union."

"That support has been earned," Brooks declares, citing "life-changing contracts" at Daimler Truck, American Axle, Allison Transmission, Cornell University and Rolls-Royce. The result was indeed earned, but it is not the one Brooks describes. What the apparatus earned was the mass rejection of the membership.

Within months of the 2023 Big Three agreements, Stellantis fired 2,000 temporary workers, while its "job-saving" contract sanctioned closing Tipton Transmission and 10 parts distribution centers. Layoffs and shift cuts followed at Mack, Toledo and Warren Truck. Ford cut Rouge EV production to one shift, and GM announced over 3,000 layoffs in late 2025.

At Daimler, the "celebrated" agreement was followed by temporary layoffs affecting 573 workers at Mount Holly and Gastonia. The UAW falsely claimed to have eliminated tiers at Cornell and Rolls-Royce. Both contracts preserve lower pay for new hires, and Rolls-Royce also retains the division between workers with pensions and those relegated to 401(k)s.

The American Axle local counted just 179 ballots in this election after the sellout of the June strike of nearly 1,000 workers; Cornell's service-worker local counted 51. Nexteer, omitted from Brooks's list, saw workers reject three contracts

before the UAW held a fourth vote on company property without authorizing their demanded strike. Its local counted 978 ballots.

Brooks also claimed the election was a sharp rebuke to the Monitor, whose investigations into serious charges of corruption led to Brooks's ouster. Here, Brooks is campaigning to get his old job back, which brought him \$238,294 in salary and other disbursements in 2025.

The DSA, *Labor Notes* and the pseudo-left factions around them have spent decades promoting the fraud of bureaucratic self-reform, the claim that workers can defend their interests by changing the personnel at the top. Their purpose has always been to defend the apparatus against the workers. Above all, they oppose any socialist politics, through which the growing opposition could find conscious form and be directed against the capitalist system on which the bureaucracy's privileges depend.

The election shows something the apparatus and its defenders cannot hide. The overwhelming majority of workers regard the UAW bureaucracy not as their organization but as an instrument of management and the state. They have taken its measure. They know that nothing will change through it.

The election was not a "mandate" for the bureaucracy, but for a rebellion against it. That rebellion requires organization and a perspective. Workers' rejection of the apparatus must be transformed into active, organized opposition. That means building rank-and-file committees in every plant and workplace, controlled by workers themselves, to take the conduct of these struggles into their own hands.

These committees must be linked across companies, industries and national borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. And it means taking up the fight that Lehman's campaign advanced: the abolition of the bureaucracy, the transfer of power to the rank and file, and the building of a socialist movement of the working class against the capitalist system that the apparatus defends.



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