

Autoworkers on UAW election: “Workers have no faith or trust in the UAW anymore”

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Following the reelection of United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain, the corporate media and the pseudo-left have rushed to declare that he has won a “mandate” from the membership for the “militant direction” he has supposedly taken the union. Autoworkers speaking with the *World Socialist Web Site* say that the real mandate expressed in the election was a mass repudiation of the UAW apparatus, shown by the fact that more than 90 percent of eligible members did not vote.

In one of the few acknowledgements of the extremely low turnout, an editorial by the *Automotive News* editorial board noted that Fain won “in a landslide,” but that “fewer than 10 percent of active members and retirees cast a ballot.” The publication called the result one with “profound ramifications” for the Detroit 3 automakers and the 2028 contract negotiations with the UAW.

The editors were troubled by the “paltry election turnout.” Weak participation four years ago, they claimed, “could be chalked up on a new process that likely included confusion and some technical hiccups,” but “that explanation does not apply this year.”

The *Automotive News* editors pointed out that after the UAW’s worst corruption scandal in its 91-year history, members won the right to directly elect their leaders in 2022-23. But the low participation this year, they say is “concerning,” concluding that Fain “won his mandate,” but whether most of the members he will represent “had a say is another matter.”

The auto executives and big shareholders are not concerned about the rights of workers. Rather, the *Automotive News* fears the efforts to rebuild the credibility and authority of the UAW apparatus after the corruption scandal are failing, and that an apparatus without credibility may be unable to contain the anger of workers when contracts expire in 2028.

Autoworkers interviewed by the WSWS underscored this point.

“We are disgusted with the clique that runs the UAW”

James, a worker at Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant, said: “Workers really stood back and said it doesn’t do any good to vote in the elections. I don’t know how many times workers I speak with say they are considering working elsewhere. This is no longer an ideal place to work like it used to be. There are no pensions and no future to look forward to. It’s like you’re going to die in the place or you’re going to quit and find something else.”

He continued: “In 2016, the Feds came in and arrested a lot of UAW International officials. Fain came in talking a good game, but when we had a chance to stick it to the companies, we had a half-assed strike that kept us working on the line. So, it doesn’t surprise me that 90 percent of the members didn’t vote.”

James described the insecurity workers face in place of pensions. “Instead of pensions we have 401(k)s the company contributes to. But our retirement is a gamble, it’s all on the stock market. When it crashed in 2008 some guys lost \$100,000. It’s not a guaranteed retirement, it’s a maybe retirement. I don’t plan to die in this place.”

Referring to the campaign of Will Lehman, a Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker and socialist who has fought for rank-and-file power, he said, “I was 100 percent behind what Will was saying about rank-and-file power. There is not enough information, and if you inquire from the union, you play hell to get them to get back to you. They are playing to keep us ignorant.”

Chris, a leader of the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee, said: “What I think it means that more than 90 percent of workers did not vote in the UAW election is that workers have no faith or trust in the UAW anymore. We are disgusted. We know we are being lied to all the time. We know the apparatus is not being truthful. They are covering things up, like we need a printed copy of our contract. We do not know what’s really in there.

“Plus, a lot of Nexteer workers did not even get a ballot.

Fain's being portrayed like he's the second coming of Christ, but the truth is that the majority of UAW members are disgusted with him and the clique that runs the UAW."

He recounted the recent contract fight at Nexteer. "We rejected three concession-laden contracts and voted 86 percent to authorize a strike. Every decision made by workers was ignored by the UAW apparatus."

"By the time of the fourth offer, again, almost nothing was changed except some sugar-coating of the wording. We were forced to vote in the plant. Workers, including new hires, were told, 'Vote yes' and you'll get a \$3,000 signing bonus. That was a lie. Workers like myself who have worked here 20 years today are making \$24.00 an hour. That's a poverty wage."

"They didn't give us anything, and the majority of the bargaining committee told us, 'This is the best we can do, and if you don't vote for it there will be layoffs and closures.' And now the layoffs are happening."

Chris also pointed to the apparatus' political role. "Today I got 13 pieces of mail, and only two were legitimate. The rest were political ads for voting in the midterms. The UAW spends lots of money to back the Democrats. But what are they doing to fight Trump, who wants to use the 'mother of all bombs' against 90 million people in Iran?"

"An election of the bureaucracy, by the bureaucracy and for the bureaucracy"

Anna, a worker at the General Motors Flint Assembly plant, said many of her co-workers did not know a vote was taking place. "After speaking with a majority of workers before and after the UAW presidential election, I found that most of them had no idea an election was even taking place. Local 598 made no announcement of the debate, no instructions for voting, when the ballot was due, or how to request a ballot if one was not received."

"In this day and age, technology is so advanced there is no excuse other than deliberate secrecy, the deliberate exclusion of the workers on the line. This is information we should have been informed of, with all the resources like the 598 App, WorkJam App and Facebook pages associated. This is just yet another example of the UAW bureaucracy playing right in our face."

She said workers have been disgusted since the last election in 2022. "Promises made were never followed through and conditions in the plant are getting continually worse. The speedup is unbearable. The deliberate concealment of the election and workers looking for a new

representation or approach also affected the extremely low turnout of votes."

Anna continued: "My thoughts on this 'election' is that it was an election of the bureaucracy, by the bureaucracy and for the bureaucracy. An election, if you can even call it such, with only 6 percent of all eligible UAW members voting for Fain, very few actual rank and file from the shop floor. The real information about the election was only released by Will Lehman's campaign."

Anna linked the sham election to a broader assault on democratic rights. "Every day the powers-that-be are becoming less of a democracy and more of a dictatorship. Rules that have been put in place and fought for with bloodshed are being erased without any consultation by the people. No one is coming to save us. We have no voice unless we all stand together and stop production."

She described the financial desperation in the plant. "I was walking out with a group of workers yesterday, explaining how I only had \$38 left, and it's Sunday. Another coworker pulled out \$17 and said that's all she had and that she was going to sell plasma, but she passed out the last few times after. The other workers said they had no savings either."

James said the growing hostility to the political establishment is part of the same process. "Since his first term, Trump's moves against the people have made a lot of us think more seriously about politics. He has lined his own pockets and the pockets of his own family on our dime. Workers are paying more attention and looking past the BS. I told a worker who backs Trump that the Democrats are part of the money game too and both parties are two sides of the same coin. Both parties start wars to draw our attention away from the real issues that we face. War is a money game too."

Workers drew the same conclusion about what must be done. "What does this mean for us? We have to expand the rank-and-file committees," Chris said. "True, we have a long way to go, which is why we must build in mass to abolish the apparatus. The UAW officials take sides with the company and the government."

He added: "What I have learned from the campaign of Will Lehman is that all workers have the same problems. We are trying to fix our problem by uniting and supporting workers from all over the world. We can do this."

Anna put it this way: "The solution? We have to organize in rank-and-file committees and start an organized, planned procedure to bring power back to the shop floor."



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