WHY I AM NOT SUPPORTING SHAWN FAIN IN RUN-OFF VOTE



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

Shawn Fain, the presidential candidate for the UAW Members United slate, has asked me to support him in the runoff election with incumbent UAW President Ray Curry, which the UAW Monitor has scheduled between January 12 and February 28.

There are two major reasons I will not endorse Fain.

First, the initial round of elections was completely illegitimate, and the results should not be certified. Less than 10 percent of the 1.1 million active and retired workers eligible to vote cast ballots. The two top vote getters, Curry and Fain, each received less than 4 percent of the vote of eligible members.

This was not due to apathy among workers, as Fain suggests. It was the result of the deliberate policy of the UAW apparatus to suppress the vote and deprive hundreds of thousands of UAW members of the right to determine who would lead the union.

Large numbers of workers did not even know any election was taking place. The UAW did not send out notices to inform them. No posters were put up in the plants and other workplaces. Many workers never received a ballot despite calls to local union offices and the UAW Monitor.

How else can you explain that only 1,279 out of 30,000 members, or 4 percent, of UAW Local 5810 and Local 2865 at the University of California cast ballots in the election? Far from being apathetic, these members are among the 48,000 UC workers engaged in the largest academic workers strike in US history. Other locals in UAW Region 6 with extremely low turnouts include the 29 votes out of 11,000 California State University graduate employees in UAW 4123 (0.2 percent), and 74 votes out of 9,000 University of Washington teaching assistants (0.8 percent) who are members of Local 4121.

In a Facebook video on December 7, Fain endorsed this sham election and dismissed the disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands of workers. “Some people are making a big deal about how only 106,000 members voted in the election,” he said, “and to that I’d simply say I’d much rather have a hundred thousand members casting a ballot deciding who’s going to be the top leaders of this union than one thousand delegates or less at a convention who have been pressured or intimidated by the people in power.”

Last year, UAW members overwhelmingly voted to abolish the undemocratic delegate system and establish a direct membership vote for top UAW leaders for the first time in the union’s history.

After the UAW apparatus failed to block the “one member, one vote” system, Curry & Co. worked diligently to restrict the number of workers who could participate in the election, leading to a sharp drop in the number of ballots cast in the first round of the elections (106,000) compared to the referendum vote (143,000).

The UAW, backed by the UAW Monitor, the Biden administration and the federal courts, opposed the lawsuit I filed last month to demand a 30-day extension of the voting deadline and for the federal court to compel the UAW to inform all of its members about the election and make sure they have ballots.

Instead, the UAW apparatus did everything it could to confine participation in the election to the tens of thousands of national, regional and local officials who are loyal to the apparatus. In this way, they figured, the election would be nothing more than a beauty contest between contending factions within UAW apparatus itself, excluding any real input from the membership.

This brings me to the second reason I will not endorse Fain. He claims all the candidates opposed to Curry agreed with each other on "reforming the union." Now, he says, we should tell those who voted for us to back Fain "to finish the job." I ran in the elections not to reform the UAW apparatus but to abolish it and transfer power to the rank and file on the shopfloor.

Fain's defense of the legitimacy of the elections is bound up with the fact that he is a longtime UAW bureaucrat who rose to the top of the trash heap in the UAW apparatus by collaborating in the destruction of the jobs, living standards and working conditions of UAW members.

As a member of the UAW-Chrysler negotiating committees in 2009 and 2011, he agreed to cut the wages of new hires in half, abolish the eight-hour day and expand temp work. By the time the 2015 negotiations rolled around, Fain had been appointed as an assistant director of the UAW-Fiat Chrysler Department. Federal prosecutors would later describe the department as the center of the "culture of corruption" when they convicted Fain's boss, Norwood Jewell, for taking millions in company bribes for signing and enforcing pro-company contracts. It strains the imagination to believe Fain did not know what was going on underneath his nose.

If elected, the only change that would occur is that Fain would increase his current salary of $156,364 as an "Administrative Assistant" at Solidarity House to the nearly $300,000 that a UAW president pockets.

Many workers voted for Brian Keller because they opposed Curry and Fain. But Keller has responded to Fain's appeal for support by calling on his supporters to vote for him. While claiming he "could not publicly endorse anybody," Keller said, "You got Ray Curry, and you got Shawn Fain—it's not a difficult choice." If Fain is elected, Keller said, "we'll see what he does for the membership. I hope he does right. I hope he's a man of his word. But time will tell, we'll see."

There is no mystery about what Fain will do. He has loyally served the UAW apparatus for his entire career. Like Curry, he will collaborate with the corporations in the continued attack on the UAW membership.

Throughout my campaign I have warned that the replacement of one union bureaucrat with another would do nothing to advance our interests. That is why I have centered my campaign on building a network of rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers ourselves, as a new center of decision-making power and struggle against the corporations.

I call on workers to demand that all the candidates for UAW president be included in the second round of the election, and that all workers be fully informed about the election. Only in this way, can workers cast a meaningful vote, instead of choosing between two union bureaucrats who combined received less than 10 percent of the votes of eligible voters.

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