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USA

UAW: Mixed Reform Results

- Features -



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THIS SPRING DELEGATES were elected to the United Auto Workers Constitutional Convention that will be held in mid-June. As the UAW website notes, the convention will “make critical decisions, including constitutional amendments and resolutions on workplace and social issues.” [\[1\]](#)

The convention will also make nominations for the International Executive Board (IEB) elections that will take place in the fall. A slate, headed by current president Shawn Fain, has just been announced. It includes longtime members of the Administration Caucus (AC) and three regional directors from Fain's former slate.

The UAW convention provides an opportunity to evaluate the state of the union since a corruption scandal (2017-2021) resulted in the conviction and imprisonment of 16 top UAW officers, including former UAW presidents Gary Jones and Dennis Williams.

This article* outlines the UAW's subsequent path. The new leadership, the first elected directly by the membership, took office in two batches, with Fain inaugurated just hours before the 2023 Bargaining Convention opened. There the new IEB prepared delegates for the 2023 contracts at GM, Ford and Stellantis. As they rolled out their strategy over the next months, the IEB forged a new direction.

Following the 2023 Stand Up Strike, the problems confronting the UAW suggest a much bumpier road than initially contemplated as the leadership sought to double the membership with new organizing. Obstacles involved a change in the political climate following Trump's inauguration, as well as false internal accusations that split the IEB two years ago.

The Background to the Crisis

Since the days of Walter Reuther, the UAW's leadership maintained its hold on the union's apparatus through the Administration Caucus.

The AC was a machine that nominated, helped fund and campaigned for its members who, when elected, appointed a bevy of union representatives. New officers were encouraged to join the AC or would find themselves frozen out of the information chain that ran through it.

In 1950 the union agreed to a five-year contract with General Motors, known as the “Treaty of Detroit.” Its very length signaled the contract would focus on higher wages and benefits rather than working conditions. As Nelson Lichtenstein notes in *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*, this was negotiated “quickly and in complete secrecy.” (280)

Members never had a chance to consider whether this was a straitjacket or a foundational step forward. For GM, it brought stability at a time when that was its highest priority. But 30 years later, the growth of non-union and often foreign-owned plants in the South, automation and rising competition from abroad threatened that bargain.

During the 1979-83 recession, the AC took the position that concessions were the way to save jobs. Once the

economy recovered, they maintained, the union would regain the ground that had been bargained away.

As the industry then moved to restructure itself, the AC deepened their cooperation with the companies. "Joint programs," beginning with the contract at GM Saturn, were touted as the way forward.

Various forms of jointness (Quality of Work Life, team concept, management-by-stress, joint education and training programs, co-management, Global Manufacturing) lured the union to reduce its independent voice by collaborating with management. Victor Reuther came out of retirement to oppose it, writing:

The team concept is more than a mere gimmick; it is an attempt by management to control not only the worker's behavior on the job, but also the worker's feelings and thoughts. The employer plays upon the worker's desire to use his or her creativity and intellect. The team concept promises the worker that he or she will be something more than a mere factory hand, calls upon him to think, and asks him to cooperate with management.

"But cooperation with management ever so subtly turns into competition with one's fellow workers. In the struggle for productivity and even quality, department is pitted against department, and worker is pitted against worker. What began by appealing to the worker's idealism turns workers into informers and weakens union solidarity. (Choosing Sides: Unions and the Team Concept by Mike Parker and Jane Slaughter with forward by Victor Reuther, Labor Notes, 1988)

The Big Three generously funded the programs. For example, between 1982 and 2000 GM alone spent \$3 billion. With management approval, the union appointed all union-side staff, greatly expanding the AC's patronage system.

As Fiat Chrysler's vice president Alphons Iacobelli noted when he authorized personal credit cards to union staff, it was to keep them "fat, dumb and happy." According to court records, the lax financial oversight of the programs bred kickbacks and theft amounting to at least \$7 million. A culture of corruption spread. [\[2\]](#)

There were caucuses opposing the AC from its beginning, around both the union's democratic processes and its contractual demands. African American workers, seeking to end both the discrimination they faced from employers and a lack of respect from union officials, organized both Black-only and racially integrated caucuses to press their issues.

In opposition to the concessions of the early 1980s, the New Directions Movement developed in Region 5. As regional assistant director, Jerry Tucker trained local leaders to unleash their members to oppose concessions by clogging up production.

Reviving the "work-to-rule" tool, Tucker called this shop-floor tactic "running the plant backward." It didn't take long for employers to forgo concessions and agree to new contracts.

Tucker's decision to run for regional director after showing how to checkmate employers infuriated the AC. He was expelled from the caucus and ran as an independent reform candidate, but was narrowly defeated at the Constitutional Convention.

Able to prove illegal delegate votes had been cast, Tucker won a re-run. However, with less than a year left on his

term — and amid continued AC undermining from above and below — he was unable to accomplish his goals. The AC defeated Tucker in his run for a second term and snuffed out the developing movement through a system of rewards and punishments.

But New Directions left a legacy: it demonstrated how to oppose concessions and exposed the AC's interference in elections. It called for the direct election of national officers by the membership rather than by convention delegates and for the election, not appointment, of union representatives.

Over the next 20 years, employer attacks deepened through the development of long-term temporary workers, two-tier wages, and terminating post-retirement health care and pensions.

During the 2008-09 economic crisis, UAW officials flew to Washington, DC to support GM and Chrysler in asking Congress for federal money to avert supposed bankruptcy. Autoworkers Caravan, a small group of autoworkers, drove to DC and held a press conference challenging that cooperation. They argued that since the federal government was to have a majority stake in the companies, it should use the opportunity to build a public transportation system.

Instead, UAW officials worked with the companies and Congress to renegotiate contracts and suspend the right to strike. Eventually the federal government sold their shares back at a deep discount, and corporate profits rebounded.

One Member, One Vote (1M1V)

As the government investigation of corruption was coming to light in 2019, a new grouping, Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD), launched a campaign for a special Constitutional Convention to consider a 1M1V motion. While the resolution passed in several locals, time ran out.

The group planned to relaunch the campaign, meanwhile the scandal resulted in indictments. UAW members were stunned by the collusion between top UAW officials and management as well as by accounts of officers ordering lavish dinners, smoking thousand-dollar cigars and spending weeks playing at fancy golf clubs on the UAW's tab.

In May 2021, as former UAW officers were sentenced and imprisoned, the UAW agreed to repay \$15 million to joint programs for money incorrectly paid to the union and \$1.5 million to the IRS for taxes owed.

With the agreement of the union, the settlement in U.S. District Court assigned Neil M. Barofsky to be the UAW's independent monitor. His assignment was to investigate further corruption and oversee the union in setting up a transparent financial system.

Barofsky later mandated the IEB, still controlled by the AC, to carry out a referendum vote on whether to change the process of electing top officials. The IEB did little to publicize the mail-in ballot, but UAWD — numbering no more than 300 members and retirees in a union of more than a million — launched its 1M1V campaign, talking with coworkers and leafleting plant gates. Of those who voted, the majority supported moving to direct elections. [\[3\]](#)

Brofsky directed the IEB to amend the union's constitution and an election was set. After some discussion, UAWD decided to put together a slate around the slogan "No tiers! No concessions! No corruption!"

The resulting slate of seven candidates were not UAWD activists, nor a team, but rather an assortment of members with varying leadership experiences. Only three — Margaret Mock, Rich Boyer and Mike Booth — had previously worked together.

Would the UAWD-backed candidates be able to beat better-known Administration Caucus candidates? Disgust over the details of the corruption tipped the scales to the UAWD-backed candidates and, surprisingly, they all won!

Although six out of the seven others elected were AC candidates, the UAWD-backed candidates won the top two positions: Shawn Fain as president and Margaret Mock as secretary-treasurer — and the highest-ranking Black woman ever elected to the IEC. Others on the anti-concessions slate included two vice presidents, Rich Boyer (overseeing Stellantis, and the highest-ranking Latino elected to the IEB) and Mike Booth (in charge of GM), and three regional directors (two of whom were African Americans and one a Latino).

In the UAW, the president and secretary-treasurer are the officers with the greatest responsibility for the day-to-day running of the union headquarters, Solidarity House. The vice presidents and regional directors focus on particular areas.

Stand Up Strike

In a break with tradition, Fain met and shook hands with UAW members rather than holding a formal handshake ceremony with company executives.

Traditionally, as the press snapped photos, the UAW President shook hands with the CEO of each company to open formal negotiations. As talks progressed, the UAW would select one of the three to target. If negotiations broke down by the expiration of the old contract, the UAW workers in that corporation struck. When an agreement was reached, the UAW demanded the others accept that contract as well.

Instead, on the day bargaining began, Fain skipped the handshaking, saying he'd do that once there was a tentative agreement. He went to Metro Detroit plants and shook hands with workers. It was a very festive moment!

Launching UAW zoom meetings, Fain focused his presentations on each company's profit and CEO compensation package. Against the backdrop of this enormous wealth, the union's 10 demands seemed achievable.

Getting rid of two-tier wages was the members top issue. The tiered system had only been passed and maintained with UAW officials selling its necessity. Whether long-timers or new hires, workers saw new hires earning half wages and almost no benefits as grossly unfair.

Restoring Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA), changing the draconian absentee policy and ending mandatory overtime were also high on the list of demands. But all 10 were emphasized.

In the weeks before the contract ran out, members were urged to wear union T-shirts and hats to work, and borrowing from the Teamsters, Fain encouraged locals to organize "practice pickets" and rallies. The International also made several videos of workers telling their stories and discussing their goals for the upcoming contract.

Workers and the media both speculated that these extensive preparations signaled that once the old contract ran out,

maybe the UAW would shut down all Big Three facilities. Just hours before the deadline, Fain called the strike, selecting one plant from each corporation.

This limited but growing strike kept up the pressure on all three companies. At weekly zoom meetings, Fain would update members on negotiations. In the past, bargaining sessions were highly secret; now the week's negotiations were reviewed and workers at another set of facilities called to join the strike. However, if a company settled an issue, it might be given a week's reprieve.

In addition to maintaining 24/7 picket lines at all gates, members built food banks, set up kitchens to feed strikers and their families, organized clothing exchanges and spoke to the press. When workers at Ford Michigan Assembly organized a solidarity caravan to a Stellantis Jeep plant just across the Michigan-Ohio border, caravaning spread. Workers and their supporters were high on the energy of this constantly expanding strike.

When the strike ended abruptly six weeks later, Fain and the vice president in charge of each corporation held zoom meetings to outline the highlights: a 36% wage increase over three years, an end to wage tiers, restoration of COLA, a pledge to job security, some constraints on mandatory overtime and a one-time bonus for retirees.

Other issues — securing benefits for those who had been tiered or moving ahead on work/life balance — had been taken off the table. While some members felt the strike should continue expanding and work through the remaining issues, the contracts passed by 69.3% at Ford, 68.8% at Stellantis and 54.7% at GM.

Organizing Everywhere, Especially in the South

Following the Stand Up Strike, the UAW leadership announced a plan to double its membership by organizing 13 non-union facilities. These included foreign-owned companies such as Volkswagen, Hyundai, Mercedes and Toyota along with electric vehicle companies Lucid, Rivian and Tesla.

Determined to break through the wall southern politicians had perfected — passing “right-to-work” laws, and delivering a business-friendly climate with hefty financial incentives for the corporations — the IEB unanimously voted to fund the project at \$40 million and outlined their goals for the local Organizing Committees (OC).

When 30% of the workers at any company signed union cards, the UAW would announce the organizing drive. On reaching 50%, the UAW would help them build a public rally; at 70% the International would demand the company recognize the union.

Volkswagen workers quickly reached the first goal; they had lost the vote for UAW recognition in 2019 by just 57 votes. With two previous campaigns under their belts, they were ready to try again. In April 2024 Volkswagen workers, 4300 strong, voted three to one for the union.

However, the momentum was cut short just a month later when workers at the Mercedes-Benz plant in Alabama voted the union down, 2642 to 2045.

The setback was particularly devastating because the Organizing Committee thought they were in the driver's seat. During the final weeks the campaign strategy shifted to relying on team leaders to keep workers updated.

True, team leaders talk with everyone on a daily basis, but team leaders also have relationship to management. With a last-minute company decision to replace the hated CEO, the newly appointed CEO walked the floor every day, urging workers to give him a chance. Team leaders swung to his side, influencing enough coworkers to sink the campaign.

That defeat, and the nearly two-year struggle of Volkswagen workers to negotiate their first contract, halted the big organizing drives. By the end of August 2025, a UAW campaign at a Huntsville, Alabama International Motors manufacturing plant had fizzled.

Of course, members are disappointed by the vote at Mercedes and the failure to even get that far at Huntsville, but there hasn't been an assessment of what problems developed. Without that evaluation, demoralization and grudges may sap the energy necessary to begin again.

It took Volkswagen workers three attempts before they won, and comments they made indicate that they won because of what they'd learned from past defeats.

Although the UAW had hopes for union recognition at battery plants, mostly located in the South, two issues blunted that possibility. First, the Trump administration is hostile to electric vehicles and in response corporations have cut back their plans.

Second, while GM and Stellantis agreed to recognize the UAW if a majority of its workforce signed up, Ford did not. The "pattern" agreement wasn't quite a pattern.

The planned \$11.4 billion investment at Blue Oval SK joint venture (between Ford and Korean battery producer SK On) included two plants in Kentucky and one in Tennessee. Last August the UAW narrowly won the union election at the Glendale, KY plant (526-515).

But recently the joint venture was dissolved. While Ford will own the two Kentucky plants, all 1600 Glendale workers are being laid off. Repurposing the plant for energy storage, Ford announced that the laid-off workers are "eligible" to reapply to the new company.

Volkswagen Contract

First contracts are notoriously difficult to negotiate as management hunkers down. Volkswagen insisted that they would only increase wages by 20% while the UAW demanded parity with Big Three, a 24% increase. This led to a three-month standoff with the union voting to authorize a strike but eventually agreeing to 20%.

After two previous attempts, workers at the Volkswagen plant in Tennessee won UAW representation in 2024. It took them more than another year to secure a contract. BY-NC-SA

The company also stood firm against longer breaks. But workers did win COLA, a significant reduction in their health care costs, and gained two floating holidays along with profit sharing, an attendance bonus and various bonuses, including a \$6500 signing bonus.

In view of Volkswagen's layoff last year, workers wanted and felt they won job security language. Of those voting,

96% supported ratification.

Earlier the UAW had also secured a contract covering 7500 workers at the Daimler Truck/Thomas Built Buses at four North Carolina plants and two far-flung southern distribution centers.

Organized in the 1990s, the locals had been stuck with wage differentials between the truck and bus plants. Adding to workers' worries about the future, Daimler had two truck manufacturing plants in Mexico up and running.

The UAW organized a contract campaign that included wearing union T-shirts on Wednesdays and practice pickets in front of each plant leading up to the contract deadline. It was clear that they would strike if there was no tentative agreement but an agreement came at the last moment.

The new contract, passed by 94%, puts wages in the master agreement, ends wage tiers, increases the shift premium as well as wages, and includes COLA and profit sharing. In the last contract the union won a truck quota as a job security measure. This contract upped that daily quota by two. [\[4\]](#)

As the result of this mobilization strategy, the leadership has been able to negotiate wage increases and bonuses along with beating back the employers' effort to saddle workers with higher health care costs. Yet the International failed to use the negotiation to aid a Daimler local in Detroit where management had fired two of their chairmen.

Implementing the Win

In summarizing these negotiations, it's clear that employers are willing to fork over money (however reluctantly), but they aren't interested in making life for their employees more livable, on or off the job. Intensifying the workday is their bottom line.

Clearly president Fain wants contract campaigns and strikes to be well organized. On the other hand, there is little information on how to implement the contract. It's as if once the text is signed, the company would live up to the agreement!

But from the company's point of view, they must make up what they just negotiated by squeezing more work out of the work force. Workers, on the other hand, must resist this intensification.

A variety of actions need to be considered, from the group working together to maintain their pace, filing a group grievance, marching on management, or shutting down a hazardous work area. It means organizing coworkers to spread the word and bringing the issue to the union meeting.

In the AC's long history of collaboration with management, they preached deference and acceptance. Jerry Tucker and the New Directions movement challenged that approach. They organized workers to back up their demands with action.

That's why unleashing the energy of the contract campaign was so critical. Instead, most of the energy dissipated. Rather than springing into action as soon as a problem popped up, workers reverted to griping about not being "serviced."

But now the problem has metastasized: Big Three contracts have not been vigilantly enforced and now layoffs have begun. GM laid off over 3000 workers in Michigan, Ohio and Tennessee; Ford furloughed about 1500; and the Stellantis Belvidere Assembly Plant — a five-million-square facility that closed in 2023 — has had its opening delayed until mid-2028 (after the expiration of the current contract). As the organizing drive has slowed, workers feel stuck.

Yet an energized pool of union activists is the UAW's most effective resource for new organizing campaigns. Each local could monitor parts coming into the docks and identify non-union suppliers. Then they could develop a plan to reach out to those workers. This would turn locals into beehives of new organizing.

Even when a campaign doesn't take off, the network can draw the lessons and restart. That's one of the reasons why evaluations are key. It should be easy to see the difference between a union plant, where members are working together to push management to live up to the contract, and one not yet unionized.

With a significant portion of the union membership voting for Trump in the last election, it's the dynamism of such a project that is likely to unite members and open up a space where issues can be discussed. Understanding how "an injury to one is an injury to all" is the essential ingredient to building the UAW's power.

A Setback and Clouded Future

The 2023 strike provided the union a running start, but the emergence of charges against the secretary-treasurer have had a devastating impact.

At the February 2024 IEB meeting, secretary-treasurer Mock was accused by the Compliance Officer, who worked out of the president's office, of using her power to stifle the southern organizing drive. Then a regional director brought a motion to accept the report and relieve Mock of a dozen of her assignments. The vote was 11-2 in favor.

One could understand a natural tension between the UAW's organizing side, represented by Fain, and the financial accountability side, represented by Mock. This might have been particularly sharp as the organizing campaign was taking off. But the reality was that in recovering from corruption that involved more than \$1.5 million of the members' dues, the UAW needed to be particularly meticulous in its accounting. [5]

(As late as March 2022 Timothy Edmunds, the treasurer of UAW Local 212 was convicted of stealing \$2.2 million of dues money from the local!) [6]

The court agreement that the UAW signed in 2021 called for hiring four additional auditors, along with more training and more centralization. Yet the charges against Mock were based on her unwillingness to allow exceptions to the three-bid rule and grant exceptions when receipts were not provided.

Immediately the motion against Mock was leaked to the UAWD Steering Committee. The committee was urged to support the disciplinary action and within days did so.

Insofar as UAWD had anything to suggest to officers it helped to elect, why did it feel the need to rush to judgment? Wouldn't it have been reasonable to encourage mediation so that the division could be overcome?

The UAWD Steering Committee, however, made the mistake not only of rushing to judgment but posting its resolution on their website for all to see. What made that decision more fraught was that Mock was the highest-ranking Black woman ever elected to the IEB. [7]

Mock challenged the charges. Then the monitor intervened to say he would review the evidence and rule before Mock's appeal went through UAW channels.

The monitor's subsequent report and supplement reveal that Fain asked Chief of Staff Chris Brooks, Administrative Communications Assistant Jonah Forman and Marni Schroeder, the UAW Compliance Officer, to craft charges against her. Several drafts later Schroeder claimed the charges as her own findings; this became the basis of the disciplinary action.

Investigating the charges, the monitor required that all emails and texts be turned over to his office. Fain refused, saying that some would reveal collective bargaining strategies that could be leaked to the corporations. He hired lawyers (on whose dime?) to challenge the monitor's access. The result was a court ruling that Fain and his staff were required to turn over all documents. [8]

After comparing the various texts, Barofsky found over 150 had been deleted. The various explanations Fain offered are embarrassing and the amount of work staff spent on crafting lies is shocking.

The monitor interviewed Fain about why he asked two African American women to make and second the disciplinary motion. Fain answered that as a white man, he thought it would "look better" if they brought the charges against her. It is painful to read these reports and absorb the humiliation inflicted upon Mock.

After reviewing the materials, the monitor dismissed the charges against Mock, noting that her only mistake had been to assume that after she came up with the idea of having lawn signs in support of the Stand Up Strike and having the idea approved, she could design them.

Fain also charged Rich Boyer with failure as vice president to discharge his duty to Stellantis workers. The report of that investigation has not been released. However, the monitor's supplementary report concludes:

After the events outlined in this Supplement and the Twelfth Status Report, the Union's recent commitments hopefully will come to mark a turning point in the UAW's progress toward enhancing its culture of compliance and accountability. The Union has committed to restoring Secretary-Treasurer Mock's departmental assignments, restoring the Stellantis Department to Vice President Boyer, allowing the Monitor access to the Culture Committee, and embracing structural changes to safeguard the independence of the Compliance Department so that it no longer directly reports to President Fain....

Ongoing vigilance will be essential, as will continued engagement with the Monitor about implementation of the Monitor's remaining compliance recommendations. But the Monitor is encouraged by the actions of the Union and is optimistic that the measures described in this Supplement signal a willingness to constructively work with the Monitor going forward as part of a collaborative effort toward installing a sustainable culture of compliance.

Under the consent decree that the UAW signed in 2021, the monitor is to serve for six years, with a longer or shorter term dependent on the UAW's success in establishing financial transparency.

The union's annual LM-2 Labor Department filing reports that the UAW has paid the monitor's office \$25.3 million since 2021, but 2025 signaled a rise of costs by 21% last year (\$7 million) as Fain unsuccessfully challenged the monitor's access to internal communication.

Internal disunity and legal battles have significantly increased expenses, impacted leadership functioning, and delayed moving ahead on financial transparency.

Larger Vision?

Energized members are the best organizers. (Jim West)

In a November 2025 Labor Notes article, "Labor Needs an Independent Political Program, Says UAW's President," Fain outlines four priorities for a workers' political program: wages, health care, retirement and control of time.

Fain encourages the formation of a workers' movement that could campaign around such issues as raising the minimum wage, stopping mass layoffs and opposing food or drug price gouging. He is careful to say this is not a move toward an independent party.

Important issues are outlined — a shorter work week (32 hours at no loss in pay), de-privatizing health care, abolishing tuition at community colleges/vocational programs and support to civil and immigrant rights — and directed toward Congress.

There is no prioritization to the long list and no campaign to push a specific bill. Nor has the UAW leadership called for locals to mobilize their membership for "No Kings" rallies or May Day marches.

The labor program is also strangely silent on U.S. foreign policy and ignores the IEB's 2023 statement opposing Washington's support to the war on Gaza. At that time the UAW called for ending U.S. military aid to Israel until a ceasefire took place and supported, with several other national unions, the founding of the National Labor Network for Ceasefire in Gaza.

As of April 2026, the IEB has not posted a statement on the UAW website or put out a press release commenting on how the cost of the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran will affect programs the UAW would like to see implemented. This is despite public opinion against the war and its enormous cost, an estimated \$1.6 billion a day.

UAW Locals 4811, 872 and 2478 have condemned the war. For their part, UAW Local 900 seems to have been the only UAW local that organized a No Kings event at their hall. Their major focus — given ICE's purchase of a nearby warehouse as a "processing center" [aka concentration camp] — is their active opposition to ICE's warehousing of immigrants, whether their fellow workers or neighbors.

The UAW's legislative program also papers over environmental problems. For example, the call for a "just transition" is an algebraic slogan presumably meaning that no manufacturing job should be lost in moving from gas-driven vehicles to EV production. Yet without examining factors that have reshaped the industry over the last 50-75 years, the assumptions that underpin the slogan ring hollow.

In 1980 the Big Three employed approximately 1.5 million workers. By the time of the 2023 strike, about 150,000

worked at the Big Three. As long as there seems to be no force behind the slogan, some members may believe Trump's America First bluster instead.

Individual vehicle production — whether powered by fossil fuels or batteries run with rare earth minerals — will never be the country's mover and shaker that cars were in the 20th century. Automation and climate change are the most obvious limiting factors.

What can replace auto production in the 21st century? The most obvious need is to build a quality and efficient public transportation system. But preparing for this monumental shift in production requires frank discussions about the role that workers and their unions can play in planning this reorganization. Shouldn't the UAW be initiating a campaign for that work?

While it's true that the UAW's membership includes nurses, office workers, librarians and graduate students, this discussion will prove valuable as these sectors face restructuring. Without a larger vision, workers and elected leaders will adapt to the interests of corporations.

The Tariff Tangle

More than a year ago, Shawn Fain chose to put the UAW's muscle behind the tariffs that Trump slapped on passenger cars and trucks entering the U.S. market. Fain called them "a major step in the right direction for autoworkers and blue-collar communities across the country."

He suggested that thousands could be rehired in months merely by adding shifts in under-utilized plants. A year later that hasn't happened except for a third shift added at Detroit Diesel. But even if jobs "returned," would they go to union plants?

At the same time, Fain has advocated for collaboration among North American unions, he remarked that Mexican and Canadian unions would just have to accept the UAW position on tariffs. Doesn't that sound like a non-starter?

Nonetheless, the idea of a North American minimum wage has been raised. This is insufficient, but much better than supporting tariffs.

Yet it is impossible to separate Trump's tariffs from his intention to cripple the Canadian economy and destroy its auto industry, and to subjugate Mexico and Latin America as a whole. (See the box accompanying this article.)

What Could the Constitution Convention Accomplish?

While the caucus that campaigned for 1M1V and then worked to elect the new leadership was unable to build roots at the local level and dissolved, undoubtedly rank and file members will run for delegates with the intention of furthering the UAW's revitalization.

The task of transforming a long-established culture where officials hide information from members and members feel

disrespected can be difficult under the best of circumstances, but the Constitutional Convention is an opportunity to discuss a wide range of workplace and social issues. These include:

- The UAW agreement with the federal government included greater financial accountability. The made-up charges against Mock are troubling precisely because they run counter to that agreement. It would be important to reaffirm the UAW's commitment to financial transparency with a thorough reassessment of how the UAW works. Flowing from that would come recommendations and concrete next steps.
- More than 35 years ago Victor Reuther identified "joint programs" as the company's method of reducing union's power. It has been identified as a site producing a "culture of corruption" within the UAW. This intricate system can be dismantled.

Instead of appointing union staff in carrying out the necessary functions — whether of union-side health and safety inspectors or benefits representatives — these should be elected positions. Democracy doesn't always lead to competence and an end to bureaucracy, but it does provide a tool to replace those who don't work out.

- Given the experiences of various organizing committees and delegates who have carried out campaigns to enforce their contracts, what lessons can the UAW draw going forward? Evaluating problems is the first step in seeking effective solutions, whether in organizing drives or at established locals.
- President Fain called on unions to align their contracts with those of the UAW and be prepared to strike together in 2028. That idea has been taken up by other unions, and most notably by May Day Strong and made concrete by the union and community response to ICE In Minneapolis.

Led by the more radical teachers' unions in Chicago and Los Angeles, MDS analyzed the January 23 Minneapolis sickout that involved at least a quarter of the city's work force. MDS then projected local actions on May Day 2026 around the slogan "No Work, No School, No Shopping." The convention therefore has the opportunity to analyze the results, particularly as Region 9A region has been working with the MDS.

Other locals and regions have been opposing ICE operations, whether that means opposing "processing centers," defending coworkers or organizing mutual aid. These reportbacks are essential in preparing for May Day 2027 and 2028.

- The UAW position on tariffs seems to be at odds with the industrial conception of taking labor competition out of the equation by bringing everyone's wages up. What are the alternatives?
- How can the union develop a sophisticated understanding of capital's continued restructuring? The failure to understand the future of the industry has proven costly if we examine the last 40 years of concessions. It is not enough to point to current profitability.
- In nominating candidates for the future IEB, what criteria is most relevant? Were they leaders in their locals? What skills do they bring to the office for which they are running? How did they handle grievances? Did they work in joint programs and if so how do they propose altering this site of corruption?

In the end, passing conference resolutions means little if delegates do not represent the membership. The convention needs to be a two-way street, with delegates bringing ideas from local discussions and, after further discussion at the convention, prepared to take resolutions back to their locals for further discussion and innovative

implementation.

The tasks facing the convention are multifaceted. The most positive factor remains the adoption of direct elections that began to break the dominance of the Administration Caucus and its record of corruption and concessions. Negative factors looming over the UAW include the political climate, which has disoriented the membership, combined with a destructive and costly fight within the IEB. This combination sapped the UAW's energy at a crucial moment. Fain's insistent embrace of auto tariffs and the union's silence on Trump's threat to take a civilization back to the stone age compound the errors.

If there is a chance to move forward — to identify the errors and assess how to reignite campaigns — the convention provides a democratic space. But discussions need to lead to action, and to adopt clear perspectives on working-class solidarity at home and abroad.

In that spirit, the convention might begin by reviewing its goals as laid out by the UAW Constitution, which starts with the following:

“To improve working conditions, create a uniform system of shorter hours, higher wages, health care and pensions; to maintain and protect the interests of workers under the jurisdiction of this International Union.”

Let the Constitutional Convention be conducted in that spirit.

Note: The author could not have written this article without the help of other UAW members, and acknowledges their valuable comments, whether or not they ultimately modified her analysis.

Source: [May-June 2026, ATC 242](#).

PS:

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[1] Photo: After a rally on the eve of the Stand Up strike, UAW IEB members led a march through downtown Detroit (left, starting with hatted man): VP Rich Boyer, Region 1 Director LaShawn English, President Shawn Fain, Region 4 Director Brandon Campbell, Secretary-Treasurer Margaret Mock, Region 2B Director Dave Smith. (Jim West).

[2] [“A Tale of Corruption by the United Auto Workers and the Big Three American Automakers.”](#) Thomas Adams, MR online, posted Aug 19, 2019.

[3] See Monitor's [website](#) for details.

[4] The Daimler Truck experience has been written up by the UAW as a [case study](#).

[5] “United Auto Workers Seek to Shed a Legacy of Corruption,” Neal E. Boudette, *New York Times*, July 31, 2021.

[6] [“Former Financial Secretary-Treasurer of UAW Local 412 Pleads Guilty to Embezzling Over \\$2 Million in Union Funds”](#).

[7] See [“UAWD: A Necessary Ending”](#).

[8] See the Monitor's [Twelfth Status Report](#), 6/17/25, and its [supplement](#), 12/18/25.