

“The election needs to be overturned, and they need to do it right” –
Indiana auto parts worker

Autoworkers back official protest by Will Lehman against voter suppression in UAW election

Shannon Jones
20 December 2022

The filing by Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman of an official protest to the federal monitor overseeing the United Auto Workers on Monday has received an enthusiastic response from autoworkers, angry over the blatantly undemocratic practices used by the union to suppress voter turnout in the first ever direct election of top UAW offices.

Lehman, a candidate for UAW president, made the case that the election results, in which long-time bureaucrat Shawn Fain and incumbent UAW President Ray Curry are set for a runoff next month, cannot be considered a legitimate expression of the will of autoworkers given the systematic suppression of voter participation by the union apparatus. This is confirmed by the fact that only about 9 percent of 1.1 million UAW active and retired members returned ballots.

Determined to exclude as many rank-and-file workers as possible from the voting process, union officials provided virtually no information about the election, the candidates or how to vote despite the vast resources of the apparatus, which sits on top of nearly \$1 billion in net assets. As the protest points out, the lack of any publicity about the union election contrasts to the vast amounts spent by the UAW to promote various Democratic Party candidates in the November election. (To read the full text of the appeal [Click here](#))

When she heard about Will’s protest, a temp worker at Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant in the Detroit suburbs, said, “I am all for it. I’m glad and I stand with him 100 percent. I hope we can have a revote.

“Today the UAW was passing out calendar books in the plant. If they can do that why didn’t they go around encouraging people to vote? Why didn’t they tell TPT workers (temporary part time) they could vote? I just started laughing, you’re passing out calendars, but they didn’t tell people they could vote or encourage them to vote. Tomorrow they are giving out free T-shirts!”

In November, Lehman had filed a lawsuit asking for a 30-day

extension in voting and that serious measures be taken by the UAW to inform workers of the election. The lawsuit was dismissed by the judge on narrow technical grounds.

In the challenge he sent to the UAW Monitor, Lehman said that “ballots should be re-issued and a new election should be held,” or, as an alternative, “the names of all candidates should be added to the ‘runoff.’ In either case, this time adequate measures must be taken to prevent the union leadership from suppressing the vote and ensure that the entire membership is aware of the election and able to vote,” he stated.

“My husband got a ballot, but I didn’t get one. I requested one but it came too late for me to vote,” a worker with eight years at the Stellantis Jeep complex in Toledo, Ohio said. Agreeing with Will’s challenge to the election, she added, “It’s BS that workers didn’t have the right to vote. Several temporary workers on my team didn’t get their ballot either and it wasn’t easy going on the monitor’s website to get one.”

A full-time worker from Warren Truck said she supported the filing of an official protest. “We need to try this, there should be a fair election where things are done the right way.

“A lot of workers were unaware that there was an election. When I asked them about the election many said, ‘What election?’ I had to explain there was an election. I only found out about it myself because someone said something to me.

“This was done deliberately by the UAW. They were really pushing the November election, we were getting lots of mailings. But I didn’t know I was supposed to even get a ballot for the UAW election. When I first heard about the election, I didn’t know the date or how it was being held. I thought we would go vote at the union hall. I didn’t know the ballot was supposed to come in the mail and that I needed to look out for it.”

The worker said the UAW didn’t want a big turnout because, “They were not ready for change. They didn’t want to be pushed out. If they didn’t tell people about the election then

there would be no opposition. It's run like that in the UAW locals, too. They even get upset if someone tries to run. There has been intimidation. Someone will write a letter slandering the opposing candidate. It gets nasty."

The official protest filed by Lehman included a survey returned by over 100 UAW members at 55 different UAW locals, which revealed "that the overwhelming majority of Locals intentionally refused to take action to notify the membership of the election and intentionally refused to update their email and mailing lists."

The Jeep worker commented on the contrast between the outdated and slipshod methods the UAW bureaucracy used to inform its members about the election to the up-to-date communication and mailing system Solidarity House used to get out the vote for the Democrats in the November 8 midterm elections.

"We always get election material from the UAW sent to our home, but they didn't even send me a ballot for the union election. I wasn't an address problem. My husband and I updated our addresses at the same time when we moved. But he got a ballot, and I didn't."

A GE Aerospace worker in Ohio said, "If they didn't use the same system to get the ballots out as they did to mail out election material for the mid-terms, that's insane. An election should be one of the most, if not, the most important thing that a union does. But judging from my union local, they were completely radio silent. If I didn't get an email from Will Lehman's campaign, I wouldn't have known an election was going on.

"There should have been a huge buzz about the election—but there wasn't anything coming from the local or the International."

An auto parts worker from Indianapolis, Indiana added, "I already knew that the union was going to pull something shady like that. That's why I kept questioning that they are not being forthright with everybody. The UAW does not want to transfer power to anybody that is not part of that apparatus. They suppressed the fact that there was a vote going on.

"Even the court-appointed monitor is a sham. The only purpose of it was so that they could say we did something about it, but it didn't work for you. Because with over 1.1 million UAW workers only 103,000 voted? Nine percent! And Will has testimony that workers did not know there was an election, did not get a ballot.

"The election needs to be overturned, and they need to do it right. If they say they're going to do it, I still wouldn't trust them. They have proven that they cannot be trusted. All their upper henchmen went to jail or have been charged."

A retiree from Ford in Ohio said, "Glad it was appealed. Ballot box stuffing takes on creativity. If the UAW hasn't thought of it, it hasn't been done. Historically it is who has counted the ballots. I appreciate you watch-dogging this election. It's like a dark cloud hanging over the UAW, and

rightfully so. For the dozen people in the UAW that got convicted, the question is how many of them didn't get caught."

Commenting on Will's call for the building of rank-and-file committees to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor, the Toledo Jeep worker said, "That's a good idea and people at Jeep would do it. This factory is the money-maker for Stellantis and we're in a powerful position. If we shut them down it would cripple the company and bring them to their knees. They are already two months behind on orders for Jeep Cherokees.

Referring to the recent announcement by Stellantis of the "indefinite layoff" of 1,350 workers at the Belvidere, Illinois assembly plant, she said, "They are trying to terrorize us before next year's contract, that's what we've been saying for a long time. They think they can get another bad contract through by threatening not to get a new product into your plant. But we got to fight."

Discussing the need to unite autoworkers with broader sections of the working class, she said, "My ex-husband used to work for Norfolk Southern. The railroad workers haven't had a contract in three years and it's BS that the Congress forced them to accept a contract they voted down. These guys worked through Covid and the railroads tried to say the workers do not contribute to the profits. That's ridiculous. If they struck there would be semis backed up for miles trying to move cars from our plant."

An auto parts worker added, "What would happen if all of the UAW said you either do it or we're all going to go on strike at once? That is what should happen. The general population is disgusted with the way the companies, and the government are all handling things; and we're tired of it; and it's going to stop. We can bring them to their knees. The people are just plain fed up."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact