10 FACTS WORKERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE DISPUTED FIRST ROUND OF VOTING IN THE UAW ELECTIONS



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

On December 19, rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president Will Lehman filed a formal legal protest over the first round of the International Officer Elections, which took place in November. Lehman is demanding that all candidates be placed on the ballot in the runoff or that the elections be re-held, citing widespread and deliberate voter suppression, which resulted in a catastrophically low turnout of less than 10 percent.

The court-appointed monitor overseeing the UAW is currently conducting a second round of "runoff" voting between long-time UAW bureaucrats Shawn Fain and Ray Curry, who each earned less than 4 percent of the total eligible votes in the first round. In a blatant disregard of the rights of union members, the UAW leadership and the UAW Monitor are proceeding with the run-off even though the results of the first round have not been certified. The results cannot be legally certified until the Monitor makes a ruling on Lehman's protest, which remains pending.

Below are the most important facts workers should know about the UAW elections uncovered in his challenge to the election results. For more information, you can read Lehman's entire 50-page protest online at willforuawpresident.org/protest.

1. THE ENTRENCHED UAW LEADERSHIP, AFTER BEING FOUND GUILTY OF GROTESQUE CORRUPTION, TRIED TO PREVENT A DIRECT MEMBERSHIP VOTE OF TOP UAW OFFICERS.

Direct elections were forced on the union by the US Department of Justice after an investigation uncovered a “culture of corruption” within the UAW leadership, resulting in the jailing of two previous UAW presidents and other top officers. UAW leaders were caught taking bribes from Chrysler in exchange for signing sellout contracts and embezzling millions of dollars of workers’ dues money to finance their luxurious lifestyles.

The Department of Justice required the union to hold a referendum on whether to hold direct elections. This referendum passed in December 2021 over the opposition of the entrenched leadership, including Ray Curry himself, who campaigned for a “no” vote.

2. IT’S NOT A “DEMOCRACY” IF LESS THAN 10 PERCENT GET TO VOTE.

One million out of the UAW’s 1.1 million eligible members did not vote in the first round of the election. The 9 percent turnout is among the lowest —perhaps the lowest—in the history of direct elections for national union officers. If the UAW was a country, it would have the lowest election turnout of any country in the world.

The low turnout was predicted by Lehman, who filed a lawsuit in November warning that a majority of members did not have adequate notice of the election. “If ballots continue to be sent at this rate each day through the November 28 deadline, total turnout will be roughly 104,000,” he warned. As it turned out, a total of 104,776 ballots were counted.

Lehman’s lawsuit, which requested a 30-day extension to election deadlines, was denied after it was opposed by the Biden administration’s Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh, by attorneys representing the UAW apparatus and the court-appointed Monitor.

3. THE LOW TURNOUT WAS NOT AN ACCIDENT. IT WAS A GOAL.

A survey conducted after the election by Lehman's campaign suggested that most locals did not provide any notice of election deadlines. A majority of workers who responded to the survey said that their locals failed to put up posters, send emails, make phone calls or send text messages notifying them about the election. Only about 10 percent of locals posted anything substantial about the election on social media or their websites.

As a result of this inadequate notice, many UAW members learned for the first time that there was an election from leaflets distributed by Lehman's campaign.

Meanwhile, UAW officials put out disinformation designed to discourage members from voting. At some locals, officials lied to temporary part-time (TPT) workers, telling them they could not vote. In a number of locals, Lehman's campaign discovered that members had been told that voting deadlines had already passed when they had not.

4. THE ENTRENCHED UAW LEADERSHIP WORKED BEHIND THE BACKS OF THE RANK-AND-FILE TO MAKE SURE THAT OFFICIALS AND THEIR CLOSE ASSOCIATES VOTED.

Lehman's protest proved that the bureaucracy skewed the vote in favor of its preferred candidates by giving notice of the election through an internal communications network called the Local Union Information System (LUIS), which had originally been set up to allow the entrenched leadership to communicate with itself. The LUIS system, which a federal judge admitted "kind of cut out the membership," ensured that the bureaucrats and their associates received notice of the election and were able to vote, while keeping rank-and-file union members in the dark.

5. THE COURT-APPOINTED MONITOR FAILED TO ENSURE A DEMOCRATIC ELECTION.

Lehman's protest documents numerous problems throughout the election that were not addressed by the court-appointed Monitor—a law firm which is being paid with millions of dollars of workers' dues money to oversee the UAW.

In light of widespread problems with the mailing lists during the referendum vote, the Monitor issued rules for the 2022 election, which mandated, "the improvement of membership mailing information to ensure the enfranchisement of as many members as possible" and "the broad education of members on the fact of the 2022 Election to facilitate as broadly as possible their participation in it…"

However, the UAW Monitor took no serious actions to enforce this mandate. Instead, like leaving a fox in charge of the henhouse, the Monitor left it up to the UAW bureaucracy to update mailing addresses and run the election. As a result, the total number of votes cast in the election was less than the number of ballots that were returned as undeliverable because they were sent to the wrong addresses.

6. THE UAW USED ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AND RESOURCES TO GET OUT THE VOTE FOR THE DEMOCRATS IN THE MIDTERMS, BUT REFUSED TO USE THOSE SAME TOOLS IN ITS OWN ELECTION.

When it came to campaigning for Democratic candidates in the national midterm elections, the UAW utilized advanced technology, organized public events, spent millions of dollars, and bombarded union members with glossy mailers.

Tellingly, the UAW did none of those things when it came to its own internal election. Instead, throughout the election, Lehman's campaign volunteers faced systematic retaliation and intimidation from UAW officials when they tried to pass out leaflets. Union officials frequently called company security on Lehman's supporters in an attempt to prevent them from campaigning, in violation of the election rules.

As Lehman writes in the protest: “In one election, the UAW leadership wanted its members to vote. In the other, it did not.”

7. THE UAW DISCRIMINATED AGAINST ACADEMIC WORKER MEMBERS.

Among 11,000 California State University members, just 29 votes were cast. Among 9,000 University of Washington students, just 72 votes were cast. Among 48,000 University of California workers (who were on strike), turnout was 2.6 percent.

There is no innocent explanation for the unacceptably low turnout among academic and student members, who comprise a large, new, and militant section of the union membership. Meanwhile, the entrenched leadership had a clear motive to disenfranchise members in these locals because it had demonstrably lower support there.

8. THE ISSUE IS NOT “APATHY”!

The UAW bureaucracy is now attempting to cover up the rigged election by claiming that members did not vote because they were “apathetic.”

It is true that many members, with good reason, do not have any confidence in the corrupt UAW apparatus. But members do vote when they are aware of their rights. Local 5810 at the University of California, for example, recently cast 4,756 votes on a contract ratification—but only weeks earlier, cast only 328 votes in the election for national officers.

This proves that the issue was not that rank-and-file members did not care. The issue was that they did not know that an election was even happening. This was the result of a deliberate policy by the UAW bureaucracy to keep the turnout as low as possible and hold on to their positions and high salaries.

9. WILL LEHMAN’S OWN VOTE WAS NEVER COUNTED.

Will Lehman was duly nominated as a candidate for the office of president at the union’s 38th Constitutional Convention in Detroit. He is a rank-and-file member of UAW Local 677 in good standing.

However, once the votes were all tallied, Will Lehman discovered his own vote had never even been scanned. If it happened to Lehman, despite the fact that he is a candidate who mailed his ballot well in advance of the deadline, it is likely to have happened to countless other rank-and-file workers.

10. LEHMAN’S PROTEST IS ABOUT THE DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS OF ALL MEMBERS, WHETHER THEY WOULD HAVE VOTED FOR HIM OR NOT!

Will Lehman is fighting for rank-and-file workers to transfer power from the corrupt UAW leadership to workers on the shop floor to fight job cuts, eliminate all tiers and overturn decades of UAW-backed concessions. But Lehman’s protest is not just about his individual rights as a candidate and member. It is about the democratic rights of all active members and retirees to meaningfully participate in an election.

Some members may feel that they were given a fair opportunity to vote, but all rank-and-file members and retirees can agree that the election needs to be redone if not all members were given the same fair opportunity to vote.

The union, the government, and the Monitor will try to sweep Lehman’s protest under the rug if they think workers are looking the other way! Will Lehman urges all rank-and-file members to read the entire protest, discuss it out loud, and submit your statements in support. Email Lehman’s campaign at willforuawpresident@gmail.com today to share your comments about the elections.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved