REPLY TO STEVEN GREENHOUSE ON THE FALSIFICATION OF MY POSITION DURING UAW PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE



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

*On September 26, I sent the email below to Steven Greenhouse, the former*New York Times *reporter who moderated the presidential candidates debate on Thursday, September 22.*

I sent an initial email to Greenhouse on September 23 protesting the falsification of my positions during the debate. That initial email, and Greenhouse's reply, are also included below.

View the clip of Greenhouse asking the question with the false quotation below. The full video of the debate can be viewed at youtube.com/watch?v=2TAY1d9nihY.

CC: UAW Monitor

Dear Mr. Greenhouse,

Your reply to my email raises more concerns than it answers.

First, you suggest that the quote you used may have in fact been accurate, despite my objections, and that I might have misspoken in the meeting. To dispel all doubt on this, I was able to locate the audio recording of the meeting, which was not public. The relevant portion is here.

Second, you write that when you read the article, "it appeared to me that it was written by a supporter of yours" and that the author would "take pains to make sure that the quotations from your remarks were accurate."

To be frank, this is not believable. The "article" includes supposed quotations from me such as: "I am running for the presidency of the United Auto Workers party (?)"; "I would like to warn the staff (?) that the Union of International Employee Implementation Committees (?) can develop greater capacity (?)"; and "I want to show workers the way forward by sending (?) a global fight." The "article" is littered with such nonsensical statements. How could you, with thirty years of experience as a journalist for the *New York Times*, read this article and think it was produced by someone who was "taking pains" to make sure anything was accurate?

Third, you do not answer any of the points I made about the obvious lack of credibility of the "Sasa Times." From your reply, you make clear that *you*sought out this source, rather than it being submitted by someone else. Did you make no effort to determine its legitimacy? Did you look at the "about page" or investigate who is behind the publication? Why did you choose a clearly non-credible source rather than my own statements, my website, or the *World Socialist Web Site*, which has been covering my campaign?

You seem to have searched out a quote from the depths of the internet specifically designed to discredit my campaign and present my call for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy in a negative light. It is also evident that one of your main criteria for selecting the "Sasa Times" is that you wanted to avoid any mention of the *World Socialist Web Site*, which is followed widely by autoworkers for exposing the betrayals of the UAW. If you were searching for articles about my campaign, including my meeting with German and Indian workers, you would certainly have first come across reports from

the WSWS, which accurately quoted my remarks. You would have quickly been able to determine that the "Sasa Times" article is a mangled reproduction, to the point of being semi-coherent, of the WSWS article.

Fourth, you state that I had "two full minutes to respond" to the question and that you are therefore "baffled" that I would demand that you issue a correction. Excuse me, Mr. Greenhouse, but you attributed an "exact quote" to me in the first question directed toward me. This "exact quote" turned out to be false, taken from an illegitimate source. I therefore had to spend the limited time I had clarifying this error.

My ability to respond, moreover, does not change the fact that you read a quote attributed to me that I never said, which opponents of my campaign will and already are using to attempt to discredit me. The only way to stop this is by making a formal statement correcting the record.

There is no question that if you had made a similar mistake in posing a question to Ray Curry or Shawn Fain, you would not hesitate to make such a correction, and, moreover, you would have exercised greater responsibility in selecting the question in the first place. However, since I am a rank-and-file worker and opponent of the apparatus, you feel you have no such obligation.

Finally, you say that as a "journalist and a writer," you are "unaccustomed to—and very uncomfortable with—people issuing formal demands to me." People, you write, should not make "stern demands" to "fellow human beings."

I am sorry, Mr. Greenhouse, but you are not the wounded party here, and you are not just a journalist and a writer. You were chosen as the moderator of the official debates for the executive offices of the United Auto Workers, debates that could be decisive in the outcome of the elections and indeed the future of the labor movement in the United States. You and you alone, as you stressed, were responsible for selecting questions and being "scrupulously neutral" in these debates. You misquoted me in a manner that falsified my position. You made a serious error. And you are "uncomfortable" with my insistence that you issue a statement acknowledging this fact?

Frankly, you seem to be placing more importance on your own offended feelings than the clarification of this issue for the hundreds of thousands of workers who will be voting in this election.

Sincerely, Will Lehman

Greenhouse's September 25 response to my initial email:

Mr. Lehman,

I am sorry that you are upset about the quotation I used from an article in the Sasa Times.

When I read the Sasa Times article, it appeared to me that it was written by a supporter of yours, someone knowledgeable, someone who was eager to promote your point of view to the world—and to UAW members who might look at the Sasa Times. And that made me think in turn that the article's pro-Lehman author would take pains to make sure that the quotations from your remarks were accurate.

I very much thought that the article's lengthy quotations of your remarks were taken from an audio recording. Indeed, when I read that article, it read like one of many articles I have read over the years that relied heavily on audio recordings.

You write that the Sasa Times article misquoted you. As I said, I believe the Sasa Times article relied on an audio recording, and it is certainly possible that in your remarks, you unintentionally called for "the complete abolition of unions," when you had instead intended to call for "the complete abolition of the union bureaucracy." All of us are human, all of us err, and many of us have at times mistakenly omitted words while giving speeches, and that might have happened in your case here.

Second, you had two full minutes to respond to that question, and in those two minutes, you vigorously made the case that what you had said in those

remarks was “My campaign advances the call for the complete abolition of the union bureaucracy,” and not, as my question stated, “My campaign supports the call for a complete abolition of trade unions.” I’m sure that your response to that question was heard loud and clear by everyone who watched the debate live or watched a recording of it.

In truth, because you gave such an emphatic and detailed response to my question, I am somewhat baffled why you are “demanding” such an extraordinary type of correction.

I am a journalist and a writer. Like other journalists and writers, I am unaccustomed to—and very uncomfortable with—people issuing formal demands to me, as you did in your letter to me. I am not General Motors, Ford, Mack Trucks or a powerful CEO. If you want to make demands to them, fine. In the world I live in, one doesn’t speak that way—one doesn’t issue stern demands—to fellow human beings.

Sincerely, Steven Greenhouse

My initial email on September 23 protesting Greenhouse’s falsification of my positions during the debate:

CC: UAW Monitor

Dear Mr. Greenhouse,

At the September 22 debate for UAW president, you asked me a question that was based on a false quotation, attributing to me a position that I do not hold. Because thousands of members of the UAW have already watched the video, I request that you record a public statement, that the Monitor can place prominently on the website that features the debate, informing viewers of your mistake and correcting the record by Monday, September 26.

Referencing an undated article from a web publication that you identified as the “Sasa Times,” you asserted that I called for the “complete abolition of trade unions.”

You did not ask me whether I said this. Rather, you asked me to respond to a quote, which you emphasized was an “exact quote,” that falsified my position. You repeated this falsified “exact quote” twice in your question.

In July, I did attend a meeting of international workers held by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). But what I actually said at this meeting was, “My campaign advances the call for the complete abolition of the union bureaucracy and putting power into the hands of the workers, who I urge to form rank-and-file committees.” My statements at the meeting were publicly reported—with the correct quote—on the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) in a July 11, 2022 article.

Instead of going to a primary source, such as my program or my website, or the WSWS, which correctly quoted me, you went to what is clearly an entirely dubious publication, the “Sasa Times.” If one attempts to access the article posted on this site, one gets a warning that “your connection is not private” and that “attackers might be trying to steal your information.” The article itself is a semi-coherent, mangled reproduction of the WSWS article, to the point where parts of it are incomprehensible. It has, moreover, no byline.

A cursory investigation of the site reveals that it is not a legitimate news source. It has no Wikipedia page and is not cited in any other publication or resource. Its own “about” section makes clear it is not a reliable source: “One of the greatest things about Sasatimes.com is the interactive part of the site. You can create your own news stories by simply making up a basic story and adding in facts and comments about the subject.”

Mr. Greenhouse, you are an award-winning journalist who worked for the *New York Times* for 30 years. You are well aware of the standards of professional journalism, which require that you check your sources before attributing a quotation to an individual. You could have performed a basic Google

search of my quotation to discover its original source in the WSWS. You presented the "Sasa Times" as a legitimate news source when you clearly knew or should have known that it was not.

You misquoted my position in the first question that was asked of me at the debate, putting me in a position of having to respond to something that I never said. In your introduction, you emphasized that you "decided on these questions." You did not misattribute any quotes to any of the other candidates. This calls into question your statement that you would be "scrupulously neutral, as between the five candidates tonight, not taking sides or showing preferences" in the debate.

I therefore demand the following: 1) That you record a statement informing workers by Monday of your mistake and correcting the record; and 2) That this statement be posted publicly by the Monitor and sent out to all UAW members.

Thank you,

Will Lehman

Watch the full UAW debate »

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willforuawpresident.org/get-involved