AFTER THE UAW ELECTION DEBACLE: WE MUST BUILD RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEES AND TAKE POWER ON THE SHOP FLOOR!



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

Brothers and sisters,

The most significant fact about the UAW elections that just concluded is that, according to the figures released last week, the vast majority of workers did not take part. Of roughly 1.1 million eligible members, only 98,029 cast ballots. More than 90 percent of the membership stayed away.

Fain received 66,166 votes, or 68 percent of the votes cast, but this is only 6 percent of the membership. Subtract the tens of thousands of officials, staff and appointees whose jobs and salaries depend on the apparatus, and the figure is closer to 3 percent of the rank-and-file. He had the full backing of the bureaucracy, and workers answered by boycotting the vote.

The corporate media and the union apparatus are nonetheless telling us that Fain won a “mandate.” This is a lie, and everybody knows it. The election, in fact, was a complete debacle for the apparatus.

What accounts for the low turnout? Four years after the last election, many workers once again never received a ballot or did not know an election was taking place. And the only campaign that challenged the apparatus itself, my own, was placed under restrictions designed to keep workers from hearing about it.

Under rules adopted at the 2022 convention and applied for the first time in this election, non-members were barred from contributing “anything of value” to a candidate. That rule was used to cut my campaign off from the *World Socialist Web Site* and its *Autoworker Newsletter*, which tens of thousands of autoworkers followed during the 2022 election.

I faced threats as well. A $202,000-a-year International official posted an image of me bound, gagged and bleeding with a gunman at my back. He kept his job until the day the count began. My campaigners were thrown out of plants, while Fain and other officials campaigned openly.

The result was that hundreds of thousands of workers never knew that there was a militant, socialist alternative in this election. I am convinced that, had they known, many of those who stayed away would have cast their ballots for me.

Moreover, absolutely nothing that either the UAW or the Monitor says can be believed. Many workers are completely skeptical of the reported results, and they have every reason to be.

But the dominant factor is the hatred of rank-and-file workers for the apparatus. Fain came into office promising to transform the union. He now claims his re-election is an expression of workers’ confidence in his leadership. If that were so, why did fewer members vote this year than in 2022?

Where workers have had a real choice, they have voted in large numbers. This summer, thousands of workers at Nexteer, Dana, Bridgewater and other parts suppliers rejected the pro-company deals pushed by Fain by margins of over 90 percent. At Nexteer, workers rejected three sellout agreements and voted by 86 percent to strike. The UAW buried the strike vote and rammed through a fourth deal on company property. But workers stayed away from an election for the leadership that imposed those contracts.

At my Mack Trucks plant in Macungie, Pennsylvania, we rejected Fain’s sellout contract in 2023 and walked out. Fain sabotaged our strike and signed a contract that got us an extra two-and-a-half hours of work a week.

Workers are looking for a way to fight. Despite the joint effort by the bureaucracy and the Federal Monitor to keep workers from learning about my campaign, we won nearly 2,000 votes in the factories and among academic workers.

To every worker who voted for me, thank you. Yours was a class-conscious vote for the abolition of the bureaucracy, for rank-and-file power and for the international unity of the working class. It is part of a growing radicalization and turn toward socialism.

The election changes nothing about the situation we face or what we must do. My campaign was never about any individual or about winning a position in the apparatus. I ran to put a program before workers and to build a movement. The idea that workers can vote someone in at the top and things will change is finished. That is as true in the UAW as it is in the elections for Congress and the White House.

The convention in June showed how the apparatus works. Of roughly 100 resolutions submitted by local unions, the resolutions committee advanced only a handful, while all 35 resolutions from the International Executive Board went to the floor. The convention blocked promised dues reductions and it authorized pay increases for the top officers. Everything is controlled from the top down.

Nothing will change unless workers take the initiative. That means building rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace, controlled by workers ourselves, to organize the fight over wages, jobs and conditions without waiting for permission from Solidarity House. The aim of these committees is to abolish the UAW apparatus and transfer power and decision-making to workers on the shop floor.

That fight must be international. The UAW bureaucracy supports Trump's tariffs and promotes economic nationalism. While the ballots were being counted, my supporters were in Windsor, Ontario, fighting for the unity of US, Canadian and Mexican workers against the Stellantis job cuts. The trade war sets us workers against each other while the corporations work together to destroy our jobs on both sides of the border.

The struggles ahead are coming fast. We are locked into multi-year contracts that do not keep up with the cost of living. The government says inflation is 3.7 percent, but every worker knows that the real cost of the necessities of life—rent, groceries, health care, gas, child care—has risen far faster. Layoffs in auto have already begun, and the corporations are investing billions in AI and automation to eliminate millions of jobs.

The billionaire oligarchy is waging war on democratic rights at home and escalating war around the world, and it is making us workers pay for both. These are not separate issues from the fight in the plants. The same corporations that cut our jobs and wages control both parties, Democrats and Republicans alike. The UAW apparatus is tied to the Democratic Party, and the media is already promoting Fain as a possible presidential candidate in 2028. Workers cannot defend our jobs, our wages or our rights by relying on either party of big business.

The union apparatus has no base beyond its paid stooges and flunkeys. The real power is in the hands of the hundreds of thousands of workers who boycotted the election. They want to fight. That opposition must now be organized. Build rank-and-file committees in every plant and workplace, linked across industries and national borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

But organization in the workplace is not enough. The fight against layoffs, inflation, dictatorship and war is a political fight against the capitalist system itself. It requires building a mass socialist movement of the working class, independent of the Democrats and Republicans, to take the vast wealth produced by our labor out of the hands of the oligarchy and place it under the democratic control of the workers who produce it. That is the fight I will continue, and I urge every worker who voted for me, and all workers in the UAW, to join it.

In solidarity, Will Lehman

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved