

On last day of convention, UAW delegates rescind strike pay increase

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The WSWS has endorsed the campaign of Lehman for UAW president. To find out more about Lehman's campaign, visit WillforUAWpresident.org.

As the United Auto Workers 38th Constitutional Convention drew to a close in Detroit Thursday, delegates voted to rescind an increase of weekly strike pay to \$500 from \$400, which had been approved the day before. The UAW bureaucracy overturned the increase after many delegates had reportedly left the convention to go home.

One delegate tweeted, "I was told proceedings would end at 2 pm today. I just left to make my flight, & now the Administration Caucus is calling a vote to REVERSE the strike pay increase the vast majority of delegates voted for not even 24 hours ago."

A worker on strike at construction and farm equipment manufacturer CNH since May denounced the move as a "travesty."

The rescinding of the strike pay increase came a day after UAW President Ray Curry demagogically praised the previous vote. "UAW members have high expectations around bargaining, and raising the strike pay is a statement from UAW delegates that they are ready to fight for the wages and working conditions that UAW members deserve," Curry said in a press release.

Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president, immediately denounced the rescinding of strike pay.

In a video statement Thursday afternoon, Lehman said, "I have just learned that the UAW bureaucracy rescinded the \$100 increase in strike pay that was approved yesterday. Ray Curry and the executive board organized another vote after many delegates already left the convention. Delegates who opposed this were called out of order.

"This is a slap in the face to every worker. The strike fund belongs to the rank and file; it is not a slush fund for UAW bureaucrats! This is why I am running to mobilize workers to abolish the bureaucracy, transfer power to the rank and file and use our assets, built up with our dues, to aid our strikes and fights against the corporations."

On Wednesday, Lehman was nominated as a candidate for president by two delegates from the convention floor. The first was a veteran Detroit-area worker who denounced the "thieves" on the UAW International Executive Board for their coverup and complicity in the ongoing corruption by top UAW officers. The second was a delegate from Chicago who stood up to support Lehman for his call for international worker solidarity.

These nominations visibly shocked and angered UAW officials, who had hoped through delegate rigging, bullying and intimidation to keep the contest limited to candidates vetted by the union bureaucracy.

After this defeat, Curry and top UAW officials read the riot act to delegates at a meeting of the Administrative Caucus on Thursday morning. The last day of the convention began with a prayer by an official, who declared, "Young people, stop disrespecting the union," which was met with a standing ovation by delegates.

This was an apparent reference to the groundswell of anger against the UAW from part-time and lower-tier workers who pay union dues but have no rights. Lehman, a young Mack Trucks worker, has won widespread support from these workers. This fact was acknowledged earlier this week by trade publication *Ward's Auto*, which wrote that Lehman "seems to have struck a chord among some of the union's newest and youngest members."

The UAW leadership also changed the nominating procedure. On Wednesday, the chair allowed only two delegates to nominate each candidate and limited their remarks to five minutes each. On Thursday, the chair allowed an unlimited number of nominations for each candidate backed by the UAW bureaucracy. Administrative caucus delegates essentially staged a filibuster, nominating the same establishment candidate multiple times in order to freeze out opponents of the apparatus. Delegates attempting to nominate opposition candidates were reportedly shouted down.

The motion to rescind the strike pay increases was moved late in the afternoon session. The convention, which had originally been scheduled to close at 2:00 p.m., dragged on until 5:00 p.m., by which time many delegates had left to catch flights they had pre-booked out of Detroit.

Supporters of the Administrative Caucus complained that an increase in strike pay would “deplete” the resources of the union and, by implication, the salaries and expense accounts of the highly paid international staff. UAW Secretary-Treasurer Frank Stuglin told delegates that if \$500 in strike pay had been in place during the 40-day General Motors Co. strike in 2019, it would have cost the union an additional \$29 million.

A few worried voices were raised in opposition. A delegate wondered what he would tell workers at his plant whom he had already informed of the strike pay increase. Another nervously pointed out that the strike pay increase had already been reported on the UAW website and the news media, including the *World Socialist Web Site*.

After calling the question and ending debate, the chair refused a call for a roll call vote and took a standing vote, with the motion to rescind passing by a reported vote of 421-181. Within minutes a vote to adjourn was carried, and delegates scurried home.

The undemocratic action capped a day of bureaucratic strong-arm tactics aimed at suppressing even token dissent. This underscores the bogus character of the “reform” of the UAW in the wake of a corruption scandal that sent two former UAW presidents and other high-ranking union officials to prison.

In another measure of the crisis gripping the UAW

bureaucracy, President Ray Curry skipped the traditional “state of the union” speech after delaying it for several days. Curry’s failure to address the convention is virtually unprecedented for a sitting UAW president.

The bulk of the four-day convention was given over to self-congratulatory videos and paeans to the union leadership, along with a series of speeches by Democratic Party politicians stressing the critical importance of the unions in lining up workers behind the militarist and pro-corporate program of the Biden administration.

The corporatist integration of the unions into the capitalist state was encapsulated by the letter President Biden sent to the UAW, which declared, “I can imagine no better partner to have by my side than the UAW.” Biden made it clear he is looking to the UAW to further cut labor costs so the US can try to catch up with China and the European Union in the electric vehicle market.

The partnership between the UAW bureaucracy and the Biden administration is aimed entirely against the working class. It is aimed at forcing workers to pay for the economic crisis and the cost of the reckless military escalation against Russia and China.

But the four-day convention only further discredited the UAW bureaucracy, which is increasingly unable to hold back the rising tide of working class resistance against inflation, social inequality and now the slide into a recession.

The campaign of Will Lehman is opening up the way for millions of workers in the UAW and outside the UAW to break free from the bureaucratic apparatuses by building rank-and-file factory and workplace committees and uniting workers internationally to defend their class interests against the profit system.

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