

“Somebody needs to stand up to all this”: Workers back Will Lehman’s lawsuit demanding extension of vote deadline in UAW election

WSWS reporting team
21 November 2022

Workers have responded enthusiastically to the lawsuit filed by Mack Trucks autoworker Will Lehman demanding a 30-day extension of the voting deadline in the United Auto Workers (UAW) election of top union officers. Lehman is running for UAW president based on a platform of dismantling the corrupt UAW apparatus and transferring power to the rank and file.

The case will be heard today, November 22, by federal judge David M. Lawson in Detroit. Lehman contends that the UAW is violating the democratic rights of rank-and-file union members to free and fair elections by failing to give effective notice of the election. So far, less than 10 percent of eligible UAW members have returned ballots, with the deadline to send ballots to ensure they are counted already passed. Many workers report not receiving ballots or not even knowing of the election.

A worker from Ford Dearborn Truck plant outside Detroit said he was excited to hear about the lawsuit demanding a 30-day extension in time to vote.

“I actually got my information about the election from the Will Lehman campaign, not from the union. I read the [WSWS *Autoworker*] *Newsletter*. I read that article about Ford workers being homeless and living in their cars. That is terrible! To work a job like this and you have to live in your car!

He said he initially thought the election “was going to be like the local elections where they were going to be going around the plant all the time saying go out and vote, passing out flyers pushing people to vote for their candidate.” He added that supporters of incumbent UAW President Ray Curry “were seen here only once!

I only saw them passing out flyers one day, and that was it.

“I watched the [UAW presidential] debate, and right away I thought that just having the debate was something new. But as I watched, I realized that a lot of it was already predetermined. If you listen to the questions carefully, and you’ve been through the experiences I have, you know that those questions were handpicked by the Curry team. They had a lot of their people sending questions. I mean these questions were from the people at the international, reps and so forth, who are sending in the questions.

“I love that Will was there to bring up the rank and file in the debate so they were actually having to deal with responses to the issues we are dealing with every day.

“Pensions for everyone should be the number one thing. Not only because it isn’t fair that the contribution for pensions and what they get in the end is all on the worker, but because it’s another setup. Once they get rid of enough of the workers who are under the old pension regime, it will become another tool for divide and conquer. The people already retired, or who can retire with pensions now, are going to lose because the people left in the plants will be told they can only get more money by taking it from off the pensioners.

“I agree the union leadership is the problem. Every time you bring up something their answer is, ‘They can do that, they can do that.’

“It’s very difficult for the TPTs [temporary part-time workers] because during a slow month they are

constantly laying them off. That is huge. If you are not a permanent progression worker, they can work you two days a week for two or three years; so, you have to have a second job.”

A worker from Ford’s Chicago Assembly Plant (CAP) and a member of the CAP rank-and-file committee spoke out in support of Will’s lawsuit. The worker has yet to get a ballot, days after the deadline to mail the ballots back passed.

“I support Will’s lawsuit,” the worker said. “I keep saying, ‘Where there’s a Will, there’s a way.’ I hope Will wins this lawsuit. At the end of the day, it goes to show the corruption of the UAW. This is uncalled for, we all have a voice. We should be voting for who we want to vote for. Less than 10 percent have voted so far of ... how many workers is it? One million? And to only have 9 percent vote? Many don’t even know there’s an election. Where’s the fairness in that?”

“I’ve called them for my ballot twice and nothing. They said, ‘Is this the right address on file?’ I told them to send it to a PO box, and that’s what they said they would do. I called two weeks ago. They said they would send to the PO box again. So far nothing. Zero. Nada. I go to check it every day. I’ve talked to many people who have not gotten the ballot at Chicago Assembly Plant.”

The worker added, “We have a lot of new people who don’t know about the vote. The turnover rate is high. They pay dues. The union officials have the upper hand. It’s contract time next year, so they hire all these new people.”

The worker added, “Some of our officials like Curry. It’s their people. They’re not going to want to mention we’re having a vote. Most of our officials wrote on our Facebook page who they’re voting for. Some people said Curry, some said [UAW bureaucrat Shawn] Fain.

“A lot of officials don’t like Will because it takes them out of control, it knocks them out of the box. They’re not with us, they’re with the company.”

UAW Local 551 at CAP began a censorship campaign earlier this year by shutting down a Facebook page prior to local elections. “These officials took down our Facebook page this year early in March. Us veterans don’t hold back our tongue. That’s why they did it, they knew. Somebody needs to stand up to all this. That’s why I’m riding with Will all the way.”

UAW officials, the worker at CAP noted, also

attacked Lehman because he’s a socialist, but workers pushed back against the attempt at redbaiting. “They don’t like him because Will’s a socialist. Someone said, ‘I’m not voting for a socialist.’ You could tell he was a union official.

“Curry and Fain don’t understand us. They do what the company wants. But we’re looking after ourselves. We need a socialist, somebody who’s for the workers.”

The CAP worker referred to the history of the militant GM sit-down strikes in 1936-1937, led by socialist-minded workers. “Our union was strong once; it fought. The women came out and supported their husbands. They stood in front of the police, that made me proud of being a woman! They helped take action. A lot of people got shot [during the GM sit-down strike].

“They fought, they had barricades to protect themselves when the police tried to shoot them and stuff, that was crazy! The union won’t do anything like that today. Now the UAW lets the company just take away what they fought for.”

A worker from Ford’s Kansas City Assembly Plant (KCAP) said, “I wish Will the best. I hope the lawsuit is a success. Workers were not informed. This has been so hush-hush.

“The ballots were not mailed to people. A lot of people at my plant didn’t even know they were having a vote. It wasn’t like in the local elections, with committeemen standing outside the gate and asking you to vote for so-and-so. I talked to several people who said, ‘I didn’t even know we were voting for president.’

The bureaucrats know they have something to worry about, or they wouldn’t be trying to suppress the vote. People are tired of hearing, ‘I’ll get back to you, brother’ and then you don’t see them for months. They’re tired of calling the union and no one getting back to them.”

For more information on the campaign of Will Lehman, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.



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