

The Will Lehman campaign marks a new stage in the development of the class struggle

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The ruling by a federal judge dismissing the lawsuit of United Auto Workers presidential candidate Will Lehman on Wednesday means that the UAW elections will conclude in two days, on Monday, November 28. This is the deadline for mail-in ballots to be received, before counting begins on November 29.

Lehman's lawsuit requested that the US District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, which oversees the UAW and the Monitor running the election, deliver an emergency injunction to 1) delay the deadlines by 30 days, and 2) require the Monitor and the UAW take serious steps to inform all workers about the election and ensure that they can vote.

The lawsuit noted that, on the eve of the deadline, only a small minority of workers have voted. Of the one million UAW members (active workers and retirees), 900,000 have not voted according to the latest figures posted on the Monitor's website. As Lehman's lawsuit explained and documented, the UAW did everything it could to prevent workers from even knowing that there is an election taking place, and thousands of workers did not receive a ballot.

The UAW apparatus opposed the 30 day extension of the deadline because it assumed, correctly, that it would result in a substantial increase in the opposition vote, and that many of those votes would be for the socialist candidate, Will Lehman. Indeed, this is the principal reason why they sought to suppress voter turnout in the first place.

The UAW's lawyers devised an absurd argument based on legal technicalities rather than the substance of the case. Lehman, they insisted, has no "standing" to bring the suit because he himself received a ballot and was not "harmed" by any problems with the election process. As Lehman's attorney argued, the individual worker's receipt of a ballot form does not mean, in and of itself, that his democratic rights have been satisfied. Every worker has the right to participate in a "meaningful" election, i.e., one that is properly and fairly held and expresses the will of the voters. This right, to which workers are individually and collectively entitled, is violated when the vast majority of

workers don't vote because they are not even informed that an election is taking place.

The court sided with the UAW, however, establishing an impossible Catch-22 situation: Only workers who were not able to obtain a ballot because they did not know an election was taking place could file a lawsuit. But, of course, these workers would not file a lawsuit to challenge the conduct of an election that they did not know about.

For good measure, the court also ruled that a challenge to the election process could only be made after the election is complete, and that it had to be directed to the Secretary of Labor—that is, to Marty Walsh, who at the UAW convention in July explicitly praised one of the candidates, UAW President Ray Curry, thanking him for his "friendship" and "support."

One important fact that did emerge during the hearings on the lawsuit is that the UAW and the Monitor relied on a communication system, known as the Local Union Information System (LUIS), which was established as a means of transmitting information between the local unions and the Solidarity House bureaucracy. The judge in the case himself noted that "that kind of cuts out the membership."

This proves what the *World Socialist Web Site* has explained throughout: Solidarity House, which did not want direct elections in the first place, attempted to carry it out as a beauty contest within the apparatus, excluding as much as possible the rank and file.

Even if one sets aside the issue of the corruption of the election process, the fact that the overwhelming majority of autoworkers did not vote in this election—somewhere between 85 and 90 percent—exposes the vast social chasm that separates the apparatus of the unions from the rank and file. The UAW bureaucracy exists as a police force over the working class. It was only compelled to have elections due to the massive corruption scandal that sent many top officials to prison for taking bribes from the companies and stealing workers' dues money. For the individuals that make up this apparatus, the membership exists only as objects to be manipulated, and as a given number of paychecks from

which dues can be withdrawn automatically.

The apparatus is, in itself, a distinct social constituency, with virtually no daily contact with rank-and-file workers. The social status and income of its members is entirely based on its police-like control of the “workforce,” which the union apparatus utilizes to facilitate its maximum exploitation.

As the Lehman campaign has exposed, any intervention by the rank and file is viewed by the apparatus as a threat to its domination. This threat is also perceived by all those social forces and interests that require a highly regimented workforce, deprived of all meaningful capacity to resist the demands of the corporations. It is especially noteworthy that the UAW elections—the first involving a popular vote in the 87-year history of the organization—have gone virtually unreported in the press. The capitalist media dared not report on a union election in which a socialist candidate was winning substantial support.

The role of the pseudo-left organizations is particularly significant. When Lehman filed his suit, they either maintained the silence that they have observed throughout the election, or explicitly denounced it. These organizations—the Democratic Socialists of America, *Labor Notes*, etc.—mirror the position of the bureaucracy: Under no condition can any action be taken that calls into question the prerogative of the union apparatus.

There is an objective, class basis, for this response. The WSWS has used the term “pseudo-left” to refer to a layer of the affluent middle class whose access to wealth is based on the subordination of the working class and the suppression of the class struggle. Philosophically, their reactionary politics are justified by innumerable attacks on Marxism, materialism and the revolutionary role of the working class, which is replaced with the promotion of identity politics—that is, the politics of racial and gender division.

These organizations also function as part of the trade union apparatus, seeking access to positions within it and the corresponding income that comes from these positions. In the UAW elections, they backed the campaign of Shawn Fain, a longstanding UAW bureaucrat, who is virtually unknown among rank-and-file workers. The pseudo-left supports the apparatus not despite its endless betrayals, but because of them.

But the most important outcome of the election process, despite the corruption of the UAW bureaucracy, is that it exploded the reactionary shibboleth that workers in the United States are chauvinists and irreconcilably hostile to socialists. Will Lehman openly stated his socialist convictions, identified himself as a supporter of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, called for the international unity

of the working class, denounced capitalism and advocated for the transfer of power to the working class.

The apparatus succeeded in preventing an extension of the deadline, but it will prove a pyrrhic victory. Ray Curry and his fellow apparatchiks will discover that convincing a capitalist judge to rule in their favor is not the same as overcoming the distrust and hostility of hundreds of thousands of workers.

Not only is there enormous support for Lehman among rank-and-file workers who were able to vote, but the election campaign has set into motion a process that the apparatus will be unable to control.

Ironically, one of the arguments made by the UAW’s lawyers in court is that a delay in the election will undermine the ability of the UAW to hold its Bargaining Convention in March, and that the timeline must be enforced to ensure the “stability” of the union. However, if the apparatus succeeds in having its candidates elected, it will only discredit it further in the eyes of workers who will not accept its efforts to ram through further concessions in contracts ending next year.

The powerful response from workers to the campaign is part of the growth of the class struggle in the US and internationally. The movement initiated by the Will Lehman campaign—to shatter and abolish the dictatorship of the union apparatus, transfer power to the rank and file, release the power of the working class, vastly expand the scope of the class struggle and direct it against the capitalist system—will continue to gain strength.



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