

Socialist candidate Will Lehman on pace to win thousands of votes in UAW election with suppressed turnout

Our reporters
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Initial results from the first-ever direct election in the history of the United Auto Workers show an important level of support for rank-and-file socialist candidate Will Lehman, as well as widespread vote suppression and alienation among the rank and file from the UAW apparatus, reflected in the abysmal 10 percent turnout.

With one-third of the votes tallied, both main candidates of the UAW bureaucracy—incumbent Ray Curry and longtime UAW executive Shawn Fain—are far short of winning a majority of votes, with 13,132 and 14,458 votes (36 and 39 percent), respectively, according to unofficial tallies. If these percentages hold, it will mean that despite their access to the massive UAW apparatus, each of the main candidates will have won the support of less than 3 percent of the roughly 1 million eligible voters. If neither receives a majority, it will send the election to a run-off.

Votes have so far been tallied from Region 9 (Pennsylvania, upstate New York and New Jersey), Region 1 (eastern Michigan and parts of the Metro Detroit area), Region 2B (Indiana and Ohio), and parts of Region 9A (New York and Massachusetts). In local after local, turnout is roughly 10 percent of the eligible membership or less. Overall, only 106,790 ballots were received by the government-appointed Monitor, though the actual number of votes cast is lower, as many ballots were invalidated or returned with written notices saying the voter was either dead or had left the UAW years ago.

At present, rank-and-file candidate Will Lehman has won 2,220 votes, or 4.8 percent of all votes cast. Each vote cast for Lehman is a deliberate and conscious decision to support Lehman's call for abolishing the bureaucracy and giving power to the rank and file.

Lehman ran on an explicitly socialist and internationalist program and advocated placing the auto industry under democratic workers' control, to be run not for profit, but to meet human need.

Lehman has won substantial support from a broad range of workplaces across the country, including 19 percent of the vote in his own local—Local 677 in Allentown, Pennsylvania—as well as 8.4 percent at Stellantis Warren Truck in suburban Detroit, 8.8 percent at GE Aviation near Cincinnati, Ohio, and 12.5 percent at AK Steel outside of Pittsburgh.

Significantly, Lehman also won 8.2 percent of the vote at the General Dynamics plant in Lima, Ohio, which manufactures the M1A1 tanks for the US military. The Lima plant was the site of a fascistic speech by Donald Trump in 2019, performed against the backdrop of several tanks and a large US flag. The fact that a significant percentage of the voting workforce supported an explicitly anti-imperialist and socialist candidate expresses the fact that the “strength” of US imperialism and the ideological glue of extreme jingoism actually rest on a fragile foundation.

The vote for Lehman is particularly significant considering the efforts of the UAW apparatus to suppress voter turnout among rank-and-file workers, the vast majority of whom were never properly informed that an election was happening. Turnout in the direct election was nearly 40,000 votes *lower* than in the 2021 referendum that forced the UAW to hold direct elections for officer positions. In another indication of widespread opposition to the UAW bureaucracy, Brian Keller has won 6,229 votes (14.8 percent) at last count.

The aim of the two factions of the bureaucracy was to

hold the direct election as an internal affair within the apparatus and those around it. The apparatus refused to distribute ballots at locals or at workplaces and denied independent candidates the ability to communicate with the membership. The UAW provided access to an email list that was first developed by the bureaucracy for internal communication and was expanded only slightly to include just over 10 percent of the membership.

Members of Lehman's campaign are present in Dayton, Ohio, monitoring the ballot counting and fighting to ensure that no eligible votes are rejected. At the ballot counting, the Curry faction of the bureaucracy is in a palpable state of crisis due to the massive repudiation of the leadership.

Observers for Lehman report that a substantial number of ballots have been returned with messages indicating widespread problems in the mailing of ballots. Many ballots were sent to individuals who are long since deceased or who left the UAW years ago. One ex-member wrote that he had not been a member since 2004: "You still send me ballots. Can you say fraud?"

Other members left notes denouncing the UAW: "I don't know anyone on this list, the UAW has done nothing for me," wrote one member who left his ballot blank. Another wrote "UAW is a joke!" and crossed out every section of the ballot. Still another said, "What's the difference? You're all crooks!" Another said, "The union has been screwing over injured workers! Taking care of injured workers should be a requirement for office."

Several retirees also wrote angry notes on their ballots. One said, "Please help the retirees! We've gotten nothing in years. No COLA as promised in every contract I worked. No profit-sharing after we gave up so much with overloaded jobs. I just had carpal tunnel surgery in both hands. Our leaders stole millions of dollars, and we got nothing!"

Yesterday, Lehman's attorney wrote to the Monitor to demand that all ballots from eligible voters that were received following the November 28 deadline be processed and counted: "This is necessary because a substantial number of UAW members either did not initially receive ballots or did not receive replacement ballots in time to vote."

Last week, Lehman sued the UAW and the Monitor and asked a federal court in Detroit to extend the voting

deadline by 30 days. Federal Judge David Lawson denied Lehman's request on the grounds that he did not have standing because he personally received a ballot and was allowed to vote. Had the judge extended the deadline, thousands more workers would have been allowed to vote.

In a statement to the *World Socialist Web Site*, Will Lehman said:

"I want to thank each and every one who voted for me and campaigned on behalf of the program that we fought for: to reorganize society based on the interests of the working class, not the private profits of the corporations. That was the basic difference between my campaign and all the others. This is a major step forward in the development of a movement of the working class.

"There are a lot of workers who may have thought they were the only ones who wanted to vote for a socialist program, and these results show that there are many more of us than anyone thought. We have shown in hard numbers that there exists a basis for the building of rank-and-file committees in every single workplace. Several thousand conscious votes for our program in America represents a social force that is far more powerful than the vote from bureaucrats and their spouses and their mothers-in-law. My campaign is not over, the fight is just beginning."



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