

In letter to *Detroit News*, Will Lehman says conduct of UAW election is a “travesty”

Will Lehman
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On Tuesday, the Detroit News published a letter by United Auto Workers presidential candidate Will Lehman exposing the undemocratic character of the UAW’s first-ever membership vote for top union officers.

Published under the headline, “‘Democratic’ UAW election is really anything but,” the letter states that the UAW apparatus did as little as possible to inform workers about the election, leading to a turnout of only 10 percent of the eligible voters.

The full letter is reprinted below.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) election ended this week, with a Monday deadline for ballots to be received by mail. This is the first direct leadership election in the history of the UAW, which up to now has had all its top officials appointed by the bureaucracy at its annual conventions.

A direct election is the result of corruption in the apparatus, with the union’s recent leadership thrown in jail and charged with accepting bribes.

Despite its unprecedented character, the way the election is being carried out is a travesty. Out of 1 million UAW members (workers and retirees), 900,000 (90 percent) have not voted. This is not because workers are apathetic, but because most workers don’t even know that there is an election. UAW leadership has done as little as possible to inform workers of their rights and ensure that they can vote.

This is why I filed a lawsuit last month in Detroit, at the US District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, asking for a 30-day extension to voting deadlines and for the court-appointed monitor to take measures to ensure that all UAW members are properly informed. As part of the lawsuit, I submitted affidavits from workers who said that they had not been notified about the election or did not receive a ballot.

In response, the UAW, the monitor and the Biden administration all lined up against extending the deadline. They all said they are not concerned about what the court itself called an “anemic” turnout. As far as they were concerned, the election was proceeding just as they intended.

Regrettably, the court evaded the central democratic issues and chose to dismiss my lawsuit on the narrowest technical grounds, claiming that since I personally had received a ballot, I did not have standing to file a complaint. This creates an impossible Catch-22 situation: Only workers who do not know about the election can file a lawsuit, but these workers would not file a lawsuit because they did not know about the election.

This rationale ignored my right, as well as the right of all workers in the UAW, to an election that is conducted in a democratic manner to ensure a leadership that represents the views of the entire membership.

One of the main arguments given by the UAW’s attorneys for opposing a delay is that it would undermine the Bargaining Convention in March, that the union needs “stability.” As a matter of fact, the blatantly undemocratic character of the election will leave union leadership without any credibility in the rank and file.

My campaign has been about workers on the shop floor. Workers all agree on is that current conditions of life are impossible. Prices are rising far beyond the minuscule wage increases negotiated by the UAW. Many of our coworkers have died from the pandemic. Meanwhile, corporate profits are skyrocketing and inequality gets worse and worse.

My campaign has won powerful support from rank-and-file workers who are looking for a way to advocate

for themselves. And we will continue to do so.

*Will Lehman, UAW 2022 presidential candidate,
works at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania*



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