

Will Lehman, socialist candidate for UAW president, wins 4,777 votes amid anemic turnout

Our reporters
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Despite a massive effort at voter suppression by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy in the union's presidential election, socialist candidate Will Lehman received the votes of 4,777 workers, according to an unofficial final tally posted by a court-appointed monitor Friday evening.

Only 103,495 votes were cast by the union's 1.1 million active and retired members. The 9 percent turnout shows that the outcome of the election is illegitimate and any leadership which may emerge from it will not have a shred of credibility in the eyes of the membership as a whole.

Incumbent UAW President Ray Curry and longtime bureaucrat Shawn Fain each received under 40 percent of the vote, winning less than 40,000 votes, though Curry won several hundred more than Fain. The two main candidates of the bureaucracy failed to win the support of 4 percent of the total membership. According to the rules, the two top vote getters proceed to a run-off if no candidate wins over 50 percent of the vote. No run-off can be legitimate if the two candidates failed to receive close to a combined 10 percent of the vote in the first round.

It is evident that the vast majority of UAW members were unaware that an election was taking place or did not even receive a ballot. The UAW apparatus and its entrenched leadership, which had opposed direct elections in a referendum last year, took only the most minimal efforts to inform workers about them, hoping to suppress turnout as much as possible and confine the process to their favored candidates.

"This election was a travesty," Lehman told the WSW.

"Approximately nine out of 10 UAW members who are eligible to cast a ballot did not vote. That's not because they don't care, it's because they didn't know an election was happening. While there was voter suppression across the board, it is now clear that the UAW conspired to prevent almost the entire UAW academic worker membership on the West Coast from voting at all, even though 48,000 UAW members are engaged in a courageous strike against the University of California system. There is no innocent explanation for this. This vindicates my campaign's decision to sue the UAW and the Monitor two weeks ago to extend the deadline and notify

the membership. The judge's decision denying my request has been proven totally illegitimate."

Indeed, some UAW locals with thousands of members saw turnout of *1 percent or less*, while numerous other locals saw turnout of less than 10 percent.

- According to the UAW Monitor, UAW Local 4123, with over 11,000 members at the California State University System, returned just 29 ballots—a turnout of just 0.26 percent. Lehman won 24 percent of the votes in this local.

- UAW Local 4121, with approximately 9,000 members at the University of Washington, submitted just 74 ballots, a turnout of 0.8 percent. Lehman won 23 percent of the votes cast in this local.

- UAW Local 5810 was sent 6,000 ballots to post-docs and academic researchers at the University of California system, where workers are currently on strike. The local reportedly returned just 328 ballots, a turnout of 5.5 percent. Lehman won 13 percent of votes cast in this local.

- UAW Local 2865—also on strike—was sent 30,138 ballots but only 921 votes were cast. Lehman won 15 percent of this vote. There is no explanation for why only 36,000 ballots were sent to the 48,000 striking UC workers.

The number of ballots tallied by the Monitor fell by nearly 30 percent, by approximately 40,000 votes, compared to the national referendum last year, in which workers voted to implement direct elections. Roughly 143,000 members voted in the referendum.

Despite the UAW bureaucracy's efforts to suppress the vote, Lehman won significant support at a broad swath of workplaces, including auto factories, parts warehouses, heavy and military equipment manufacturers, and universities. Lehman, a second-tier worker at Mack Trucks, ran on an explicitly socialist and internationalist platform, calling for the abolition of the corrupt, pro-corporate UAW apparatus and the transfer of power to rank-and-file workers.

- At Local 677, at Lehman's Mack Trucks plant in Pennsylvania, he received 151 votes, 18.6 percent of the total.

- Local 2069, the Volvo Trucks New River Valley plant in Virginia: 67 votes, or 11.1 percent

- Local 600, Ford Dearborn Truck: 111 votes, 2.9 percent
- Local 249, Ford Kansas City Assembly: 103, or 5.7 percent
 - Local 140, Stellantis Warren Truck: 85 votes, or 8.4 percent.
- Local 1268, Stellantis Belvidere Assembly in Illinois: 77 votes, or 6.9 percent

Lehman also won important support from relatively smaller plants where workers have been engaged in struggle over the past year. At Locals 180 and 807, covering striking CNH workers in Racine, Wisconsin and Burlington, Iowa, Lehman received 16 and 15 votes respectively, approximately 11 percent of the votes cast at each. At auto parts maker Ventra in Evart, Michigan—where workers rejected a UAW-endorsed concessions contract by 95 percent earlier this summer—Lehman received 11 votes, or 14 percent of those counted.

As the WSWs previously reported, Lehman attracted support from workers at military equipment makers. At the General Dynamics plant in Lima, Ohio, which manufactures the M1A1 tank for the US military, Lehman received 8.2 percent of the vote. At AK Steel in Butler, Pennsylvania, which makes military helicopters, Lehman received 12.4 percent, and at the GE Aviation plant outside of Cincinnati, Ohio, he received 8.8 percent.

Among UAW members at the universities, Lehman also received considerable support. At the New School in New York City—where Lehman recently visited the picket lines of striking adjunct faculty—he received 63 votes, or 14.4 percent of those cast, at a local which also covers part-time faculty at New York University. At University of Massachusetts Amherst, he received 23 votes (13.5 percent), as well as 23 votes at Harvard (7.6 percent).

It is apparent that the rank and file in many locals learned that an election was taking place not from union officials, but from emails and plant-gate leafleting conducted by Lehman's campaign. The UAW bureaucracy's efforts to keep workers uninformed coincided with a virtual blackout in the national press as well as those publications presenting themselves as "left," such as *Jacobin* magazine.

In recent weeks, Lehman filed a lawsuit in US District Court requesting that the UAW voting deadlines be extended by 30 days, and that real measures be taken to inform all workers that the elections were taking place. The suit included dozens of statements from rank-and-file workers that they had not received a ballot despite requesting one multiple times from the Monitor.

The UAW bureaucracy and the UAW Monitor, as well as the Biden administration's Department of Labor, all opposed the suit, arguing that Lehman did not have "standing" to pursue the case. The federal judge sided with the UAW and the Monitor and dismissed the suit, despite acknowledging that Lehman had raised serious concerns about the manner in which the UAW was conducting the election.

The low turnout reflects both the efforts by the apparatus to suppress the vote and the deep alienation of rank-and-file workers from the bureaucracy, which has imposed brutal attacks on wages and benefits on behalf of the corporations over the past 40 years.

The immense hostility of workers to the UAW apparatus found expression in the fact that the two candidates most heavily promoted as favorites by the media, Curry and Fain, both long-time members of the bureaucracy, received only approximately 39,000 votes each, a combined total of roughly 8 percent of the total membership eligible to vote.

The vote by several thousand workers across the US for Lehman, on the other hand, explodes all the reactionary myths that the American working class is irredeemably hostile to socialism. At workplaces from Detroit to rural Iowa and Virginia, to Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio, workers voted for an avowed socialist and internationalist, supporting his call to end the dictatorship of the bureaucracy and place power in the hands of workers on the shop floor.

The campaign by Lehman has taken place amid—and consciously articulated—a growing rebellion in the working class. Facing skyrocketing living costs and unbearable working conditions, more and more workers around the world are being radicalized and looking for a way to fight back. This is seen in the US in the ongoing strikes by tens of thousands of academic workers and the courageous struggle by more than 100,000 rail workers against the combined forces of the corporations and the capitalist state.

At a growing number of plants and workplaces, workers have begun to form rank-and-file committees, including the GM Flint Assembly Plant, Ford Chicago Assembly, Stellantis Detroit Assembly – Mack, in the rail industry and most recently at the University of California. This burgeoning movement for the rights and interests of the working class must now be carried forward and vastly expanded.



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