

Will Lehman, socialist candidate for UAW president, receives nearly 5,000 votes despite bureaucratic suppression of election turnout

Marcus Day
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Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW), won 4,777 votes, or nearly 5 percent of the 103,495 votes counted, according to the unofficial tally released by a court-appointed monitor on Friday.

The broad support Lehman received among rank-and-file workers across the US reflects the rapidly developing political radicalization of the American working class. The vote explodes the myth that workers in the United States are intransigently hostile to socialism.

Will Lehman ran as a socialist and internationalist and supporter of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. His support for the policies of the Socialist Equality Party is no secret. He called for the dismantling and abolition of the pro-corporate UAW bureaucracy and the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor. Lehman made clear his opposition to the capitalist system and demanded the end of private corporate ownership of the auto industry.

Far from alienating the auto workers, Lehman's political convictions and militancy gained him broad support among workers in UAW locals throughout the United States. At plants in states where workers are routinely presented as right-wing—such as Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, Iowa, Missouri and others—he won between 4 and 8 percent of the vote. There are a significant number of plants where Lehman—one of five presidential candidates—received at least 10 percent of the vote.

At the plant at which he works in Pennsylvania, Lehman won nearly 20 percent of the vote.

The 4,777 votes cast for Lehman is not a full and accurate measure of the support for his candidacy. It is

blatantly obvious, based on the final tally of all the ballots, that the UAW bureaucracy corrupted the election with a massive vote suppression operation.

Less than 10 percent of UAW members eligible to participate in the election cast a ballot. Out of a total membership of more than 1 million, barely 100,000 votes were received and counted, according to the UAW monitor's figures. The abysmal turnout is not because of workers' "apathy," as the bureaucracy and its apologists claim, but rather because a significant portion of UAW members did not know an election was taking place. Tens of thousands, and even possibly hundreds of thousands, of UAW members were not provided with a ballot.

The most glaring demonstration of the suppression of turnout is shown in the vote totals reported for academic workers on the West Coast:

- At the California State University system, out of 11,000 UAW Local 4123 members, *just 29 ballots were returned. This means that only 0.26 percent of the Local 4123 membership cast a ballot.*

- At the University of Washington's Local 4121, with 9,000 members, just 72 ballots were counted, *a turnout of 0.8 percent.*

- At the University of California system, just 328 ballots were received for Local 5810, and 921 for Local 2865. There are currently 48,000 UAW members entering their fourth week on strike across the UC system, *yet turnout for the UAW election was less than 3 percent.* It is simply not believable that tens of thousands of workers in the midst of a courageous and self-sacrificing strike did not vote out of "apathy."

Across hundreds of UAW locals elsewhere, turnout was also less than 10 percent. Under such conditions,

the only plausible conclusion is that the Solidarity House bureaucracy deliberately suppressed the vote and violated the democratic right of the rank and file to participate in a legitimate election.

The corrupt union apparatus, fearful of a growing mood of militancy among workers and desperate to cling to power, worked to keep workers in the dark about the election as much as possible. The bureaucracy—and behind it, powerful corporate and political interests—hoped to confine the race to their favored candidates, incumbent President Ray Curry and UAW International Representative Shawn Fain, a longtime member of the Solidarity House machine.

But neither of the two candidates could muster substantial support, with each receiving fewer than 40,000 votes, or less than 4 percent of the total membership eligible to vote.

In calculating the actual support for Ray Curry and Shawn Fain, the two Solidarity House candidates, it should be noted that a substantial portion of their votes was cast by the thousands of bureaucrats who are employed by the UAW. Solidarity House utilized an internal communications system, known as LUIS, to make sure that members of this privileged layer received ballots and cast their votes.

The UAW monitor—who throughout the election has largely allowed the bureaucracy to trample on workers' rights unimpeded—has said that Curry and Fain will proceed to a run-off in January. But any such race between just these two candidates would be wholly illegitimate.

In a statement released Sunday, Will Lehman demanded that all five candidates who were nominated at the recent UAW Constitutional Convention be allowed to participate in the second-round ballot. "In this context," Lehman said, "accepting the notion of a 'runoff' between Curry and Fain would make a mockery of workers' rights. This is why I am demanding that all candidates should be on the ballot in the second round. This time, however, the entire membership must be informed of the election and able to vote in it."

The Lehman campaign will mobilize opposition to Solidarity House's plans to restrict the second round election to Curry and Fain. Having kept 90 percent of union members from participating in the voting process, the UAW plans to keep the three other

presidential candidates—Will Lehman, Brian Keller and Mark Gibson—out of the run-off election.

The minuscule turnout substantiates the lawsuit filed by Lehman against the UAW and the UAW monitor prior to the counting of ballots. In the suit, Lehman requested a 30-day extension of voting deadlines and real measures to ensure that all UAW members were informed about the election.

The UAW apparatus and the monitor, as well as the Biden administration's Labor Department, all lined up against Lehman's lawsuit. Unable to adequately answer Lehman's claims that workers were being disenfranchised, they instead fell back on the argument that the court did not have jurisdiction to hear the suit, and that Lehman lacked "standing," since he had received a ballot.

The judge who heard the suit acknowledged the seriousness of Lehman's arguments, writing that they "should cause concern that a less-than fulsome response from the membership may portend election results that are not genuinely representative of the will of the voters." However, the judge nevertheless sided with the UAW apparatus and dismissed the case in a cynical decision that expressed indifference to the fact that workers' democratic rights were in jeopardy.

Lehman's campaign has already given voice to a broad-based rebellion that is striving to put an end to concessions and break the dictatorial grip of the reactionary union apparatus. It has provided a powerful impulse for the expansion of the work of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which will transfer power from the pro-capitalist and corporatist unions to the workers.



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