

UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman submits official protest challenging voter suppression in elections

Marcus Day
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Read Lehman's full protest filed with the court-appointed Monitor overseeing the UAW elections documenting voter suppression. We urge workers to share it as widely as possible and submit your statements supporting the challenge to the election results.

On Monday evening, Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and candidate for United Auto Workers president, filed a formal protest with the court-appointed UAW Monitor over the conduct and results of the national UAW election.

The 122-page protest provides a detailed and comprehensive demonstration that, given the widespread suppression of the vote by the UAW bureaucracy, the election cannot be considered a legitimate expression of the will of the membership, and the results should not be certified.

“This election was characterized by a deliberate suppression of the vote of the rank and file by the entrenched UAW leadership,” Lehman writes in the protest.

“The union intentionally failed to provide adequate notice to the rank and file, who are not accustomed to direct elections and would not ordinarily expect to receive ballots. This fact is confirmed by the extremely low 9 percent turnout. Hundreds of thousands of members were simply unaware that an election was taking place and did not vote. In some locals representing tens of thousands of younger academic workers, turnout was less than one percent.”

On December 5, the UAW Monitor announced unofficial results from the UAW's first-ever direct elections of its national leadership. The elections were held as the result of a years-long corruption scandal

which sent more than a dozen top UAW officials to prison.

The Monitor reported that only 103,495 ballots were counted, out of a total eligible voting membership of 1.1 million active and retired workers. This reflects a turnout of less than 10 percent, the lowest turnout by far for any direct union election. By contrast, the first direct election for the Teamsters union leadership in 1991 saw a 28 percent turnout.

Lehman's formal challenge to the election results extensively documents—including with numerous statements submitted by workers and data from other direct union elections—how the UAW apparatus failed to inform workers that elections were taking place.

“On top of the lack of adequate notice,” Lehman states, “what little ‘notice’ that the union did provide was uneven and discriminatory, utilizing a Local Union Information System (‘LUIS’) that a U.S. district judge noted ‘kind of cuts out the membership.’ This ensured that union officials received notice while the rank-and-file workers who were more likely to vote for my campaign did not.”

At the same time, the UAW went to great lengths to “get out the vote” for the Democratic Party in the run-up to the US midterm elections, held at almost the same time—in other words, the UAW had the means and resources to inform workers of the union elections but chose not to do so.

“There is no innocent explanation for this contrast: If the union had put the same resources into its own elections that it put into its campaign in the national midterm elections, the turnout would indisputably have been far higher,” Lehman writes.

In November, Lehman had filed a lawsuit in the US

District Court requesting that voting deadlines in the UAW elections be extended by 30 days and that serious measures be taken to ensure all workers were informed of the elections. The judge in the case dismissed the suit on narrow technical grounds, while acknowledging serious problems with the election procedure.

In his current protest, Lehman said that “ballots should be re-issued and a new election should be held,” in order to remedy the widespread disenfranchisement of workers’ rights. “In the alternative, the names of all candidates should be added to the ‘runoff.’ In either case, this time adequate measures must be taken to prevent the union leadership from suppressing the vote and ensure that the entire membership is aware of the election and able to vote.”

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