

“The problem is not ‘apathy,’ it’s the UAW bureaucracy”: GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee denounces voter suppression in UAW elections

GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee
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The following statement was issued by the GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee. To contact or join the committee, email gm.flint.rfc@gmail.com.

The GM Flint Rank-and-File Committee denounces the attack on the membership made by UAW Local 598’s newspaper, the *Eye Opener*. The article appearing in the December issue, “Alarming Membership Election Apathy,” is written by Debi Kirchner, supporter of UAW President Ray Curry and member of the local’s Education/Publicity Committee.

The piece is a slander as well as an insult to the intelligence of the rank and file. Kirchner writes, “In our first chance to have a direct say in the UAW election of the International Election Board, the membership came up short.”

We want to set the record straight. It’s not the rank and file that came up short, but the UAW bureaucracy. The UAW bureaucracy deliberately suppressed information about the first ever-direct elections for national UAW officers and disenfranchised the overwhelming majority of UAW members, many of whom did not even receive their ballots.

The UAW’s intentional suppression of the vote has been conclusively demonstrated by Will Lehman, a rank-and-file worker from Mack Trucks and candidate for UAW president. Lehman submitted a protest to the UAW Monitor on December 19 challenging the 2022 UAW International Officer Election results in their entirety. Lehman’s well-documented, 122-page report established that there was a deliberate suppression of the vote carried out by the entrenched UAW leadership, and because of this, the results should not be certified.

“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,”

Lehman states in the protest. “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 1 percent.”

Most notably, Locals 5810 and 2865, where 48,000 striking University of California workers have been fighting for their lives against poverty wages, saw turnout of just 2.6 percent. On strike for six weeks, these workers could hardly be described as apathetic.

The *Eye Opener* only reports the votes of the bureaucracy’s favored candidates, Ray Curry and Sean Fain. The three other candidates on the ballot—Will Lehman, Brian Keller, and Mark Gibson—are not even mentioned. The votes received for Fain and Curry only represent 4 percent each of the 1.1 million active and retired members eligible to vote.

Kirchner states in her article, “It was a no fuss, no muss vote. No one had to drive to vote, no one had to spend a penny on gas or stamps.”

Once again, the UAW bureaucracy shows they think workers are children that they can condescendingly lecture. They’re spinning a dishonest narrative, trying to shift blame onto the workers and distract attention from the real reasons for the low turnout. The problem is not worker “apathy,” it’s the pro-corporate UAW bureaucracy.

Like many UAW workplaces throughout the US, our plant had no official notices that there was an election, and we never once received a single text message or email about the election from the UAW. However, all shop floor workers at our plant are regularly communicated to by the company through text messages, calls and emails. We are notified when lunch is postponed, when a team meeting is scheduled, or when a train is blocking the tracks to advise us to seek an alternate route. This is a company platform put in place to

alert the entire workforce, which we are encouraged to sign up for. The UAW chooses not to use this system or similar technology.

As Lehman documents in his protest, the UAW had ample means to communicate with rank-and-file workers about the elections if it had wanted to, as proven by the endless flyers and other messages the UAW churned out to promote the Democrats in the midterm elections.

Simply put, we were not made aware there was an election. For example, there was not one word about the election in the September issue of the *Eye Opener*, even though the UAW Constitutional Convention held July 25-29 nominated five candidates for president. Instead, a full page was devoted to endorsing Michigan Democratic politicians for the midterm elections.

In an affront to every class-conscious worker, the front page of that issue featured an article and photo of Local 598 Chairman Eric Welter and Ray Curry standing with President Joe Biden and GM CEO Mary Barra at Detroit's Auto Show. Biden was introduced to the event by Local 598 President Ryan Buchalski.

The pictures speak volumes—the union apparatus, GM and the government all united in defense of profit against the working class. Earlier this month, in a major assault on all workers, the “pro-labor” Biden administration passed legislation banning strikes by railroad workers.

The November issue of the *Eye Opener* also featured the Secretary of Labor, Marty Walsh, who opposed the 30-day extension of the UAW election deadline fought for by Will Lehman's lawsuit. Walsh also championed the anti-strike law against the railroad workers. Walsh is quoted in the *Eye Opener* as saying that “real strength comes from organizing and educating the local membership,” urging workers to vote in the midterms while we were kept in the dark about the UAW election. What a fraud!

The union bureaucracy works with and is a critical component of the Democratic Party. They conspire to suppress working class opposition, and in the case of the UAW elections, suppress voter turnout and rob workers of our democratic rights.

We are also aware that the UAW apparatus has long ago abandoned any struggle against GM. The betrayals carried out by the UAW bureaucracy have resulted in the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs, the ending of COLA, pensions and the eight-hour workday, as well as the neglect of our health and safety. In our plant, at least 1,000 workers are highly exploited temps who are very supportive of what Will Lehman is fighting for, including the elimination of the hated tier system.

Based on its record of corruption and betrayals, the UAW apparatus feared a mass turnout of the membership would

result in the entire current leadership being tossed out of office. Their fears were magnified by the fact that a genuine socialist, Will Lehman, was on the ballot who called for the abolition of the corrupt UAW apparatus and the transfer of power to the rank and file. They thus had every reason to want to limit the turnout to their own cronies and apparatus people.

We're hardly apathetic about all the concessions that Curry, Fain and the rest of the gang from Solidarity House have given away. In recent statements cited in the *Detroit Free Press*, Mary Barra said that GM and the union will face an “uncertain economy” which could influence terms of the 2023 contract negotiations. In other words, Barra's remarks make clear that GM has no intention of meeting even the minimal demands of workers, let alone the restoration of previous concessions. GM is positioning itself to demand massive new concessions, including plant closings and job cuts, which the UAW bureaucracy will comply with.

As rank-and-file workers, we must take action to prevent our fate being determined by the pro-company union apparatus. Many of us in the plant have grandparents, great-grandparents and other relatives who participated in the Flint sit-down strike of 1936-37. We are aware of the great struggle they conducted which led to the recognition of the UAW and historic rights for all workers. These traditions live in us.

We appeal to all workers at GM Flint Truck Assembly to join the GM Flint Rank-and-File committee and oppose the union bureaucracy's efforts to ram through the illegitimate election. Instead of a phony run-off between two bureaucrats, we demand a rerun where all five candidates are on the ballot again and every worker is informed of the election and measures taken to ensure all active and retired workers receive a ballot.



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