Workers back Will Lehman protest over voter suppression in UAW election

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The United Auto Workers bureaucracy and the court-appointed UAW Monitor are rushing ahead with a runoff election between incumbent President Ray Curry and UAW International Representative Shawn Fain. This is being done even though the first round of voting has not been certified, and the Monitor has not responded to the charges of widespread voter suppression by Mack Trucks worker and UAW candidate Will Lehman.

Lehman filed an official protest on December 19, which detailed how the UAW bureaucracy took no serious measures to inform workers about the first-ever direct membership vote, resulting in a turnout of barely 9 percent of the 1.1 million eligible voters. In a Thursday night debate, Curry and Fain, who are both part of the entrenched UAW bureaucracy, did not say a word about the historically low turnout or Lehman's protest.

Several workers spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* about the protest.

"I agree 100 percent with Will's protest over the suppression of the vote in the first round of the UAW elections," a UAW member in southern Ohio told the WSWS. "The only appropriate action is to run the election again or to have all the candidates take part in the second round.

"The whole process was illegitimate, and Will detailed it in his protest. But Curry, Fain and the UAW Monitor are going ahead with debates and the runoff, even though all the evidence shows the first vote was illegitimate. That just shows what they think of the membership. They don't care about us.

"The 9 percent turnout was shameful. Fain and Curry are trying to say this was due to apathy. Will showed it was the result of a deliberate effort to suppress the vote. The union has vast resources to inform workers that a vote is happening, and they could have used whatever means necessary to do it. They spent huge sums of money and used the latest technology to lobby for the Democrats in the midterm elections, but they didn't do anything to notify every UAW member about the union election.

"Notifying the members should have been the most pushed and advertised piece of business, but it wasn't. In my plant most of the workers didn't even know there was an election. 'There's an international vote, for what?' one co-worker asked me. My local can get the word out to every member about a golf outing, but they couldn't inform us about the election."

The worker explained that the UAW had been mandated by the court-appointed monitor to make sure the largest number of workers could vote so they could get a "trusted and duly-elected leadership."

Instead of enforcing this, he said, "The UAW Monitor used an honor system that allowed the same people who never wanted a direct membership vote to oversee the election. There was zero accountability for the leaders even though they had been caught for being involved in so much corruption. Not to have serious oversight of all the mandates, well that's just mind-blowing.

"The small number of academic workers who voted was shocking. A 9 percent turnout overall is bad, but in California, where the University of California workers were striking, it was 5 percent and below. In Washington state, not even 1 percent of the academic workers took part in the election.

"For Curry, Fain and the rest of the UAW bureaucracy, there are a lot of jobs and lots of money at stake in this election. Will is calling on rank-and-file workers to abolish the bureaucracy and take power in our own hands. The bureaucracy is afraid of that and wanted to keep the vote as low as possible, to keep their own positions.

"At my plant, the UAW committeemen push the claim that workers and management have the same interests. This undermines class consciousness among workers. But every contract, the divergence of interests rears its head. The purpose of corporate management is to extract as

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much production, efficiency and profits out of the fewest number of workers.

"Despite different political alignments, workers do stick together. I can see growing awareness among my co-workers that conditions must change. Everyone can see that the health care system is collapsing and that the costs are unbearable and financially crippling. Inflation is eating up our paychecks. Workers cannot get time off, sick leave or even time to see a doctor. When it comes to it on the picket lines, the objective reality sets in and workers start to see the material interests that divide us and management.

"When I watched Will in the first debate, I thought to myself, 'Man, he's got guts.' He was calling Curry and Fain out to their faces about the corruption. He was not hiding that he wants the bureaucracy removed and he is a socialist. They didn't know what to say.

"By issuing this protest, Will is standing up for the rights of workers. He is fighting for the rights over every worker, whether they supported him or not, against being robbed of the right to vote. In his protest, Will said they didn't even count his own vote. You can't make this stuff up.

"There should be another vote, and the UAW should be held accountable to inform all the members about the vote and their right to vote. The International UAW has the capacity to nationally mobilize for the Democrats in the mid-term elections, but they wouldn't do the same for union election. This is more than negligence. The bureaucracy has material interests it wants to defend against the rank and file. The closer the union officials come to the organs of economic and political power, the more they share those interests.

"At my plant zero percent of the workers knew there was a debate between Curry and Fain tonight. Not a word was mentioned. Other than the UAW committeemen, I would bet most members don't even know there is a runoff. I never saw a postcard in the mail about voting. My local updated members' emails so they could send out a survey for the upcoming contract this year. But that was before Christmas. They clearly didn't update the mailing lists for the UAW election.

"Like Will's protest said, there is no mechanism to communicate with the members. But everybody has smartphones, emails and texts. If they wanted to, they could have informed us about the election. Instead, they were just silent."

A supplemental worker at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly plant in suburban Detroit said, "It is totally unfair to go ahead with the election runoff when workers weren't educated about the first round and couldn't vote. The UAW officials do what they want, when they say this is supposed to be an organization that protects its members.

"No one in the plant was talking about the debate for the two candidates in the runoff. There was no promotion of it. Everything at our local union is hush-hush. We pay union dues to these people to represent us, but they don't do their job.

"I read about Will's protest to the monitor about the election. The union officials want to get reelected, so they kept the numbers of votes small. If more people voted, they would get kicked out. We need new faces, new ideas and a new staff. Some of them went to jail for corruption but it still exists.

"In our local union, the stewards discriminate against the supplemental employees [SEs]. We don't only have two tiers, we have three. There's full-time and part-time. I'm a supplemental employee. I worked 2,400 hours last year with no medical, no profit sharing, no overtime pay. SEs have no say-so and are the bottom of the barrel. The union treats us like we don't exist. I pay union dues just as much as a full-timer.

"This facility has more than 1,200 SEs and it couldn't function without us. The company came and said they want to reduce SEs to 1, 2 or 3 days a week instead of rolling us over to full time. I have a cousin at Sterling Heights Assembly that has been a SE for three years. He has never missed a day of work.

"I've texted with Will and spoke to him about the changes we need. The insurance SEs get is pathetic. You can get into a doctor's office, but you get partially treated. You only get one free checkup a year. We pay for prescriptions. We don't get dental or optical, and we can't see specialists. I owe $400 on a bill now. That's like an entire week's paycheck. Even if we roll over to full-time, it takes another year before you get dental or optical care.

It's going to be a long, hard fight to change the corruption and the discrimination against SEs. But, we have to start it."

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