

“The election was a farce, and the monitor didn’t monitor anything”: Retired GM worker backs Will Lehman protest against voter suppression in UAW election

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On December 19, socialist candidate for UAW president Will Lehman filed an official protest over the conduct and results of the first round of the election. We urge workers to share it as widely as possible and submit your statements supporting the challenge to the election results.

One month after Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and candidate for United Auto Workers International president, filed a formal protest over the national UAW election results, he has still not received a reply from the court-appointed UAW Monitor. In a letter sent last week, Lehman demanded the Monitor respond to the protest, which detailed how the UAW bureaucracy systematically disfranchised union members during the first direct election of top UAW officers.

Only 9 percent of the 1.1 million eligible active and retired UAW members voted in the first round of elections, which was concluded in November. Neither of the two pronounced “winners,” incumbent president Ray Curry and long-time UAW International Representative Shawn Fain, received more than four percent of the votes of eligible members. Nevertheless, the UAW Monitor has sent out ballots and is moving ahead with a runoff election between the two UAW bureaucrats.

Under the terms of the election rules, the UAW Monitor has the power to order a “rerun” of the elections if the legal rights of union members have been violated. On this basis, Lehman has demanded a rerun of the first round of the election, or, in place of that, the inclusion of all the first-round candidates in the current runoff.

Under the election rules prepared by the Monitor, the results of the first round of elections cannot be certified until protests are investigated and resolved. Absurdly, however, the Monitor’s rules allow the runoff to proceed and the winner to be seated by February 2023 “irrespective of the final certification of the 2022 Election.”

Autoworkers and other UAW members across the country have responded with anger over this effort to run roughshod over their democratic rights and install a president who has no legitimacy.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke with Lyle Roussey, who retired after working for 25 years at different General Motors plants in Michigan.

He told us, “First of all, there were not enough votes cast to make this a real election. Only nine percent of the eligible voters, that’s ridiculous. It’s obvious that people didn’t get their ballots. It wasn’t apathy or confusion. If workers got their ballots, they would have

mailed them. Something drastic happened.”

Lyle commented on the Local Union Information System (LUIS), which was used to compile addresses to send out the ballots. “I don’t understand how the mailing list was compiled. [LUIS] was designed as a communication system between the International and local union officers and ‘kind of left out the members,’ like the federal judge said during Will’s hearing in Detroit. The judge was in a position to do something about it, but he didn’t.

“I got my ballot, and I was never a union officer. Maybe they had my right address because I attend retiree meetings every few months up here. It’s clear the UAW bureaucracy wanted to discourage voters, and they fixed the election. But even after all the corruption and the lack of cooperation, the Monitor still allowed the UAW leadership to run the election. The monitor did not monitor anything, as far as I can see.

“I remember the first ever Teamsters elections in 1991. The turnout was 28 percent, Will said in his protest. That was low, but it was nearly three times the turnout in the UAW election. And there was probably less than nine percent of the actual [UAW] members who voted because 40,000 or more of the votes came from union officers and their ass-kissers. That’s even more evidence that the rank and file were never informed.”

Lyle contrasted the lack of information union members received about the election with the flood of get-out-the-vote material the UAW sent out on behalf of the Democrats running in the mid-term elections. “I got these big colorful cards for the Democrats, which said, ‘Paid for by the UAW.’ They spent tons of money, but evidently the UAW Monitor did not require them to do the same thing for the UAW elections. The monitor used the honor system with the UAW bureaucracy. But there is no honor among these thieves, and a lot of them were sent to jail. So much for the one man, one vote system; we never got an honest election.”

He said UAW members had been concerned about voting for the leadership for decades. “It was always a sore point that the president and other top leaders were appointed at the conventions, and that they picked one of their boys to automatically be the new president. It has been a clique system for the longest time.”

Lyle commented on the hypocritical column Curry wrote for the *Detroit News* where Curry stated, “The right to vote is only meaningful if ballots get to members” and added that “the future of

our great union is too important for just 20 percent of our membership to decide.”

“Curry only said that so later he would be able to say he wanted a big turnout. He was only trying to cover his butt because he knew the UAW was doing everything it could to keep the vote down and the leadership in power. The election was a farce and sham, and the Monitor should have made it a serious endeavor to make sure it was a fair election.

“Will wants to get rid of the whole UAW bureaucracy and transfer power to workers on the shop floor. If more workers were able to vote, Will would have gotten huge support especially from the young workers. The temporary guys are all for a change in the union leadership because the existing bureaucracy sold them down the tubes, along with the Obama administration, which demanded the cutting of new hires’ wages during the 2009 auto bailout. When I hired in, it used to take 90 days to get to full wage. Temporary workers told Will that some of the UAW committeemen told them they didn’t have the right to vote. They can only lie like that because they know there won’t be any repercussions.”

On the minuscule turnout among UAW academic workers in California and Washington state, Lyle said, “Those numbers were completely out of whack. If they got their ballots in the mail, they would have voted. But the turnout was terrible. The University of California workers were in the middle of a six-week strike; you can’t say they were apathetic. They just were not aware of it. How in the hell did they keep the election so secret out there?”

Lyle came back to the role of the UAW Monitor who was appointed by a federal judge in May 2021 under the terms of consent decree between the UAW and the Department of Justice. In an appointment proposed by the UAW bureaucracy, banking regulator Neil Barofsky was charged with overseeing the “reform” of the UAW bureaucracy, and after the membership voted in a referendum to establish direct elections, to ensure “the right of every member of the electorate to vote” in the 2022 Election, “consistent with American democratic traditions.”

The Monitor mandated the UAW bureaucracy to improve its mailing information “to ensure the enfranchisement of as many members as possible” and carry out the “broad education of members on the fact of the 2022 Election to facilitate as broadly as possible their participation in it.”

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“The Monitor said all of this, but he didn’t put any rules in place to make sure the membership was notified about the right to vote,” Lyle said. “Why even have a monitor if he won’t enforce the rules? It doesn’t make sense. They knew the mailing addresses were out of date because they got a bunch of ballots returned with bad addresses during the referendum vote. They never updated them to the proper addresses. And the Monitor, he just let the fox guard the hen house.”

Lyle then addressed himself to Will’s demand for a rerun of the election or the inclusion of all candidates from the first round in the runoff election. “The members need to have a voice to force another election. And the rank and file needs to have a committee to monitor the Monitor.

“The Monitor is staying silent about Will’s protest and hoping it will go away. Evidently, he is not interested in a fair election. What is he going to say about all this evidence that is presented? That he didn’t know it was going on?

“As far as the UAW bureaucracy is concerned, they don’t want to

talk about the legitimacy of the election. They’re saying, ‘The Monitor is on our side, the results are fine, why even stand up and make a statement. Let’s just let things ride.’ I’ve heard them talking about listening to the membership for years. They weren’t concerned with the membership when they were taking bribes from Chrysler to sell out workers during the contracts.

“All the other candidates in the runoff are part of the establishment. They follow each other’s tails like elephants at a circus. Of course, Curry and Fain are blaming the low turnout on ‘apathy.’ They don’t want to expose what they did.

“There are strong legal grounds for another election. Will can take his case to the Labor Department. But there won’t be much hope for a different outcome from [Labor Secretary] Marty Walsh. He intervened against the railroad workers.

“The only way the membership can express its will is by going back to the type of struggles that took place in the 1930s, like the sit-down strike in Flint. Workers have to take matters into their own hands. If the UAW wants to bring back a sellout contract, workers have to strike and sit-down en masse. The only way you can get to these companies is if workers stop working and cut off their profits.”

“The rank and file has to be organized in committees, like Will says, so we can organize against the UAW bureaucracy and the company, which are working against us. We need mass walkouts. Workers can’t say, the union told us we have to go back to work, so we’re ending the strike. Workers have to say, if we are not satisfied, we aren’t going back to work and the UAW leaders can shove it. We’re the ones making them money. Young people have to learn that. That is the only way out.

“It’s not going to work at the union negotiating table. Workers are getting beat up on every contract. Inflation is sucking everything out of us. We are losing money year after year. We can’t fall for their \$5,000 ‘signing bonuses.’ You lose far more than that with these sellout agreements. We need rank-and-file committees to override the decisions of the bureaucracy.

“The vote for Will was encouraging. In all the plants workers are looking for a way to fight. I’ve been on the side of workers against capitalism for a long time, it doesn’t work for the masses. Capitalism is just for the capitalists. We create the wealth, but it isn’t in our hands. With the Internet, I hope more common people are reading about inequality and what is going on. They’ve let so many older workers die from COVID because they want to go after our Social Security and divert it to Wall Street. At the same time, they’ve got billions to escalate this insane war against Russia. Will’s campaign has given us all hope we can change this system.”



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