

Autoworkers in Detroit and Chicago support Will Lehman protest against voter suppression in UAW election

Our reporters**25 January 2023**

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.

Autoworkers in Detroit and Chicago have expressed support for the official protest filed by Mack Trucks workers and United Auto Workers presidential candidate Will Lehman over the results of the first round of the UAW election, which concluded in November 2022.

In blatant disregard of the democratic rights of rank-and-file union members, the UAW bureaucracy and the court-appointed UAW Monitor are rushing ahead with a “run-off” between incumbent UAW President Ray Curry and long-time UAW International Representative Shawn Fain, even though the results of the first-round of the election have not been certified due to Lehman’s protest.

As the protest details, the entrenched UAW leadership, which opposed the direct election of top UAW officers, deliberately suppressed voter turnout to prevent the members from voting them out of power. Among other things, the UAW bureaucracy did as little as possible to inform the members about the election and refused to update mailing lists for the sending out of ballots.

Although the UAW Monitor had mandated the union leadership to update its mailing list and widely publicize the election “to ensure the enfranchisement of as many members as possible,” the court-appointed monitor took no serious measures to enforce this. As a result, the total number of votes cast in the election was less than the number of ballots that were returned as undeliverable because they were sent to the wrong addresses.

In the end, only 9 percent of the eligible 1.1 million active and retired UAW members voted in the first round, with neither Curry nor Fain winning the backing of more than 4 percent of eligible voters.

On Tuesday, supporters of Will Lehman distributed hundreds of statements to workers at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit summing up the most important facts in the protest and a new pamphlet, which includes the official protest.

A temporary part-time worker at the plant who voted for Will told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I watched the debate with Fain

and Curry. I thought it was a joke. They really didn’t say much. Curry had a smirk on his face the whole time. I just laughed, really.”

Discussing the protest, she said, “The election is not legitimate. Curry said [in an October 12, 2022 *Detroit News* op-ed] 20 percent was too low last year and they just had an election where there was 9 percent, and he is agreeing with the 9 percent?

“It’s a lie for Fain and Curry to say workers are ‘apathetic.’ Obviously, they had to come up with something to say when they were asked about the low turnout. They are not going to blame themselves, so, of course, they are going to blame the workers. ‘Oh, the workers knew, they just didn’t want to vote, maybe they were lazy.’ But they didn’t notify anyone. How can they do that?

“So many ballots came back with wrong addresses and that shows something was wrong. You are supposed go on the HR system and update the address. It’s obvious the academic workers in California didn’t know there was an election, none of them did. Will said they didn’t even count his own vote. How many other votes weren’t counted? Was my vote counted?”

The worker said she got no notification about the UAW election through the mail, but “I got all kinds of mailers from the UAW for the federal election.” She added, “The union officials walk around the plant all day, they should have been encouraging people to vote. Instead, they were telling the TPTs, ‘if you get a ballot don’t vote, you are just TPTs,’ like we didn’t have a say. That’s why I messaged Will and asked him. I asked, ‘I pay union dues why can’t I vote?’ He told me all TPTs can vote and they were lying.

“There are more TPTs than full-timers at our plant. There have been TPTs that have been there for years. I think they were scared that TPTs would vote. Maybe most TPTs listened when the union told them they couldn’t vote. They just threw out the ballots.

“The election should be thrown out and redone. Everyone needs to know, including the TPTs, so they can all vote. All these guys in there now, we need them out of there.

“It shows me that these two [Fain and Curry] are not the right candidates to be representing us. If they can cheat and not make it fair for Will and let people vote for the best person, it is wrong. I think they got scared that Will could win and they didn’t want that. They are trying to do everything they can to prevent that.

“I hope Will keeps fighting. All this needs to start all over. Everyone should be told to vote. They have to erase this and start

all over. That's what needs to happen."

A Ford Chicago Assembly Plant worker and member of the rank-and-file committee at the factory said, "Will's exposure is necessary. It's mandatory he puts his foot on the gas with this. What other way can we get out of this? This is where we speed up, where we really push. We can't back down, we have to put the foot on the gas. The UAW has taken advantage of everybody. The rank-and-file workers will have to do what the union doesn't even do. There's all these different industries, and we can fight for a better life for all of us. That's the only way that works."

"I hope he keeps pushing. He's leading. He's a plow and we're pushing behind. I'm pushing him too! He gets to see directly things that I haven't fully understood. I'm not as political as him, but I'm learning."

The worker commented on the debate between Ray Curry and Shawn Fain. "I watched it and thought it was a piece of crap. Fain and Curry were dodging questions and blaming each other for different things. Those are the finalists? I've watched this for an hour ... and at no point did they say what they would do for us. They didn't really answer the questions. I see the corruption. They care about themselves but that's it."

He was scathing toward the UAW Local 551 officials as well. "They're trash," he said. "All of the union officials. They're all about their egos. They love the positions just for their attention. It's a game. Most left the local and went international. Corruption just goes up and down here."

"The way I see it, the union is stealing our dues money. That's all they do. What are they doing for us? They're doing nothing for us. The local hands us sheets full of 50 BS committees. I don't know what they do or how they're funded. But they don't do anything. Our chairman drives a new Navigator, a \$120,000 vehicle. He's got expensive cigars every time I see him."

Ford continues to try to wear down older, experienced workers in a race to the bottom, the worker added. "The new thing with corporate, they're super hard with anyone with top pay and they're being petty to get you to get fired or to quit. They're trying to aggravate the situation. There's no safety either. My friend got hit by a forklift. He's OK, but the driver got 30 days and he got 3 days. This was in November. Plant safety is a major issue."

"We just had someone die last fall, too. My buddy got bumped from A crew to C crew on the first day, he was there when it happened. Nobody consoled him or asked him anything. It shattered him."

"Everybody's mad. I hear so many people frustrated with the union every single day. I have so many friends who say they worked here 10 years and say they're going to lose their house, or can't make rent. But Ford's making all kind of profits."

He spoke out against the corporate-controlled political system that enforces these attacks on workers. "If you look at the way that Biden and these Democrats do things. He says he's 'pro-union,' but he's not for the rank-and-file. The whole Crime Bill in the 1990s, I know what kind of a snake this is. He destroyed so many African American and working-class families."

"I look at things on a bigger scale. The country once had slavery and fortunes were built from free labor. Once they started to pay for labor, they always try to get it to the lowest amount possible. It went from abusing black folks to enslaving everybody. It went from slaves to everybody on a lower income. Today there's no beating, but there's a societal whipping of workers going on, and we need to organize to fight back."

Another Ford Chicago Assembly Plant worker said, "I'm hearing more of the runoff than the actual election. Honestly, I'm not voting in the runoff. They definitely rigged the election. It was definitely unfair."

"I agree with Will 100 percent that it was not a legitimate election. Will would have been the best candidate for the position. Some of my coworkers were even afraid to vote, because they suspected the Monitor was in on it. It's all corrupt. Politics are corrupt too. It's the same thing. I wish the best for Will."

The worker added about ongoing safety problems at CAP that do not get addressed, "There's always safety issues. There was water building up and I had asked that my work area to be dried. I was slipping and sliding. I reported it multiple times and nobody came."



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