

“Everyone should be on the ballot”: Stellantis workers in Kokomo, Indiana, denounce fraudulent UAW run-off election

Jerry White
1 February 2023

Autoworkers across the Midwest have denounced the illegitimate run-off election being conducted by the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the court-appointed Monitor to choose the next UAW president.

The contest between incumbent President Ray Curry and longtime UAW International Rep. Shawn Fain is going ahead even though 90 percent of the 1.1 million active and retired members did not vote in the first round of the election, due to the deliberate disenfranchisement of voters by the UAW bureaucracy.

On December 19, Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president Will Lehman filed an official protest with the UAW Monitor, which provided a detailed account of how the entrenched leadership in the UAW, which had opposed a direct membership vote for top union officers, did as little as possible to inform the members about the first-ever direct election or to update mailing lists for the distribution of ballots.

The Monitor has not ruled on the protest and has allowed ballots to be sent out to UAW members even though the results of the first round have not been certified due to Lehman's challenge.

Supporters of Will Lehman are currently touring factories in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky and other states to inform workers about the official protest and Lehman's demand for a rerun of the election or inclusion of all the candidates from the first round in the runoff.

“The vote was completely unfair, and they should all be on the ballot!” a Stellantis worker at the Kokomo Transmission Plant in Indiana told WSWS reporters. “I knew something was fishy when my dead neighbor got a ballot,” another worker said. “My father passed away

too, and he still got a ballot. I have no faith that the UAW was sending ballots to an updated list of addresses. That's ridiculous.”

“It's voter suppression,” another Kokomo Transmission worker said. “It's just like the Republicans are doing by gerrymandering the electoral districts. The UAW and management are working together. They didn't want members to vote the corrupt leaders out.”

A second shift worker on her way into the plant told reporters, “Every UAW member should have the right to vote.” Asked what she thought about a runoff between two UAW executives who each received the votes of less than 4 percent eligible voters, she said, “I think every UAW member should vote, that is so important. The members need to be involved.

“If it was not for the workers, there would be no Chrysler, no FCA, no Stellantis, no matter what name we are. We are the ones that make this place run. Things are hard, prices have changed, and we really need to do better as a UAW membership.”

After learning about Lehman's protest, one worker began to explain the basic facts of the challenge to his fellow workers as they waited for the turnstiles to be unlocked so they could go home.

As he walked into the parking lot, the worker said, “The biggest thing is we should control, that's the bottom line. We've never been able to have a say on who is in the International, what's done with anything, and there has been a bunch of crooked crap going on for years. That's why they're all being prosecuted now. So, I'm all for it,” he said, referring to Lehman's protest.

Another worker said he had no confidence in Curry or

Fain and was glad Lehman was demanding a re-run of the election with all the candidates from the first round included.

“We got a contract coming up this year,” he said, “and you got workers in here making \$16-17 an hour. One paycheck is going for your mortgage, another is going for your car note and gas, and there is no way you can make it through the month. Why would you even want to come to work? The people at the top are making record profits and want to keep us down.”

He said workers in the plant were facing constant abuse, and the UAW officials were not doing anything to oppose it. “You got workers with 25 years and more being assigned as ‘floaters.’ They’re sent to any job, no matter how physically demanding. Now, you got a new electric vehicle battery plant being opened, and they want to keep it non-union so they can pit union and non-union workers against each other.”

A janitorial worker told reporters, “We’ve been treated like crap for years. I’ve been working here 10 years, paying dues to the UAW, and they don’t do anything for us. It’s not just here. I have friends at Caterpillar, and their contract is expiring at the end of February.”

Another worker said, “There is a huge disconnect between the upper echelon of the UAW and what’s actually going on down on the floor. It’s all backroom deals and handshakes. It starts on the local level, but it keeps right on going [to the top.] The corruption, they haven’t even touched it, the way it’s going on. Until the membership comes together, until everyone gets fed up enough, nothing going to change. Just like this,” he said, referring to the first round of the elections, “I had no idea because nobody tells us anything.”

Kokomo workers spoke to reporters the same day as the *Detroit Free Press* published a glowing interview with Shawn Fain, who did not say a word about Lehman’s protest or the suppression of votes by the UAW bureaucracy. Instead, Fain claimed there was “momentum here in the runoff” now that UAW members have “seen their vote makes a difference.” Fain started his career in the UAW bureaucracy at the nearby Kokomo Casting Plant and backed the massive wage and benefit cuts on Chrysler and GM workers which were imposed by the Obama administration and the UAW bureaucracy in 2009.

More than 150,000 Stellantis, Ford and GM workers

are heading into a major battle against the Big Three automakers and the Biden administration later this year, when their four-year agreements expire on September 14.

On Tuesday, GM announced record profits of \$14.5 billion for 2022, beating Wall Street expectations. Stellantis, which made \$8 billion in the first half of 2022, is expected to release its profits later. Ford, which will release its results on Thursday, is expected to double its annual profits to \$2.5 billion.

Lehman supporters have been visiting factories where substantial numbers of workers voted for the socialist candidate, who has called for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy and the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor through the building of a network of rank-and-file committees. In addition to Kokomo, the team traveled to the Allison Transmission Plant in Indianapolis and the Toledo Jeep Complex and Dana plants in Toledo, Ohio.

A young worker at the Jeep plant told reporters, “The working class is being pushed to the margins, and the UAW is complicit in our exploitation. The billionaires own everything, and they try to divide the working class with race and everything else. If they can take away our rights, they can take away our lives, like the worker, Tyre Nichols, in Memphis. I’m learning about socialism, and Will’s vote shows there’s support in the factories to fight this capitalist system.”



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact