

Indiana Stellantis workers denounce bogus UAW “run-off” election, back Will Lehman's campaign for new vote

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Supporters of Will Lehman, the Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker running for president of the United Auto Workers union, continue to win strong support from Stellantis workers in Indiana angered over the undemocratic character of the UAW presidential election.

Among Stellantis workers, there is broad disdain for the two candidates—incumbent UAW president Ray Curry and long-time UAW International Representative Shawn Fain—who are facing each other in a bogus run-off election organized by the UAW bureaucracy and the court-appointed UAW Monitor. Curry and Fain were the two “top” vote getters in the first round of voting late last year, which excluded 90 percent of the membership.

On Wednesday and Thursday, Lehman supporters visited the Kokomo Transmission, Kokomo Casting, Indiana Transmission and Tipton Transmission plants, which employ nearly 6,000 workers in the central Indiana region, just north of Indianapolis.

Campaigners distributed flyers summarizing Lehman's official protest to the court-appointed UAW Monitor, which exposed widespread voter suppression, including the refusal of the UAW to update members' addresses for mail-in ballots and to broadly publicize the first-ever direct election of union officers. Workers gathered at the turnstiles could be heard discussing the 10 most critical facts uncovered by the Lehman campaign and many purchased copies of the 54-page protest, which has been printed in pamphlet form.

“I got all sorts of stuff for the mid-term elections from the UAW, but I never got a ballot to vote in the union election,” an Indiana Transmission worker with 10 years told the *World Socialist Web Site*. Another said, “I'm getting more information about the run-off than I ever did in the first election.”

A temporary part-time worker at the plant said neither Curry nor Fain have done anything about the plight of temporary part-time workers, or TPTs. “I've been a TPT for six years. It's not my UAW brothers and sisters who want

TPTs treated this way. I want to have the right to vote and pick leaders that will change my life.”

Another TPT who has not been rolled over to full-time after five years at the plant said she didn't vote because she was not told about the deadline to ask for a ballot. A similar situation applied for another TPT at the plant who reported that her husband received a ballot while she did not.

At Kokomo Casting a worker said, “The UAW elections are no different from the big elections with the Democrats and Republicans. You get a chance to vote but you're stuck with people who don't represent you and you're supposed to pick the lesser of two evils. It seems like the UAW leaders wanted to make sure we only had the choice to vote for those who have been in the leadership for a long time and have done nothing for the workers.”

The Kokomo area has long been a center of militant opposition to the betrayals of the UAW bureaucracy. In 2015, members of UAW Local 685, the largest local in the area, rejected a UAW-backed national agreement by 77 percent. Rank-and-file workers angrily denounced then UAW-Chrysler chief negotiator Norwood Jewell, who was later convicted for taking bribes from Chrysler executives to sell out UAW members.

Shawn Fain started his career in the UAW bureaucracy as a skilled trades representative in UAW Local 1166 at the Kokomo Casting Plant. Appointed to the UAW-Chrysler national negotiating committee in 2009, he backed the savage cuts imposed by the Obama administration during the bankruptcy restructuring of Chrysler, which reduced the wages of all new hires by 50 percent, eliminated COLA (cost-of-living adjustment), expanded the use of temporary part-time employees and laid off thousands of workers.

By the time of the 2015 negotiations, Fain was assistant director of the UAW-Fiat Chrysler Department, headed by the notorious Norwood Jewell and denounced by federal prosecutors as the “center of a culture of corruption” in the UAW. It strains imagination to believe Fain did not know

what was going on underneath his nose.

For his part, Curry was ushered into the top position by outright criminals, including two past UAW presidents who were sent to jail for embezzling millions in union dues to finance their lavish lifestyles. Curry has overseen the betrayal of strikes by UAW workers at Mack and Volvo Trucks, John Deere, and most recently, the eight-month struggle at CNH. Both Curry and Fain were longstanding members of the UAW bureaucracy's ruling Administrative Caucus.

"I always wanted to know who cut our wages," an Indiana Transmission worker told the WSWS. "I don't want Curry or Fain. In 2009, the politicians and the media were saying that autoworkers were getting paid too much and weren't worth it. Don't tell me that. By the time we get out of here our bodies are broken down and are decrepit. I got a cousin at Kokomo Casting who just retired and within months he was dead of cancer. It's not just the corporations, it's the government that's going after us."

Another Indiana Transmission worker added, "They are laying off the TPTs who trained us when we came over from Tipton Transmission. These guys have been TPTs for five years or more, but they are getting bumped out of their jobs by laid-off workers who are coming here from Belvidere." She said it was unfair these workers have not been rolled over to full time and were now being laid off. She agreed with Will Lehman's call for a fight against plant closing and layoffs, which are being accepted by the UAW.

One TPT with six years reported that despite having had perfect attendance for over the previous two and a half years she was told she'd be getting laid off next week. "We get laid off even if we bust our asses for this company. My tier isn't eligible for a raise this year even though I feel like my expenses have tripled since my last raise. Some TPTs are being asked to move to Kokomo Engine and they're not allowed to refuse. They'll get fired if they do. But that plant is so awful, all the people who I know that have gotten moved there are looking for another job."

An autoworker with 28 years said, "It's a real shame that some folks in here can't accumulate seniority even though we've all been working alongside each other."

At the Tipton Transmission Plant a worker told the WSWS, "We're worried that the plant might close soon. We've been trying to get new products for a while, but it just isn't working. The UAW is so corrupt. I'm really not surprised that they suppressed the vote."

A veteran of Kokomo Transmission who got the leaflet summarizing Lehman's protest said, "I didn't know this was going on. The fact is the runoff has been manipulated to silence us. The union leadership never wanted a direct election in the first place, and they did everything they could

to protect their positions. This was not an honest election, conducted in the right way. It was underhanded.

"I used to be involved in the local union but I couldn't take it anymore. Union brothers and sisters are going to have to stick together. We make up the workforce, the ones who have to work overtime just to make ends meet. We're getting nothing but the UAW tops got money to pay for their lavish trips.

"I see people protesting pension cuts in France. We're going to have to do that here. They're trying to raise the retirement age to 70, so we'll die before we get Social Security and Medicare. There's no way that I am going to work until I'm 70."

One autoworker who has lived in Kokomo for almost 29 years said, "When you've seen the things I've seen, you worry about people knowing who you're telling that stuff to. I go to union meetings sometimes. But people generally don't go because there's no point in it.

"We have over 1,600 workers here, and we're lucky if 80 people show up. How can you blame us? No answers are provided whenever we go to meetings. They shove stuff in the agenda that no one even asked about, and they don't listen to us when it's our turn to identify problems that should be addressed. They tell us what they're working on. It's like the whole thing is coordinated; like we're not really meeting each other to talk about what's on everyone's mind, but it feels like the whole thing is staged for show.

"After 2010, they started two tiers in this plant. I guess things were a little better before then. But not too much really. Workers have been losing buying power at an enormous pace lately. It's scary. I don't understand how any sort of union that claims to be representing workers can allow the companies to hire temps. Some of the temps I see are probably the hardest working people in [the factory]. And they're not guaranteed any job security even in the short-term. But they have families too. And this is in the company's best interest, of course. So who does the union represent? Us or Stellantis? People who have been here longer draw conclusions about things like this. I'll tell you I never voted for two-tier wages. I don't think any of us [full-time employees] would think of anything so cruel to do to each other. And then they wonder why no one is coming to meetings."



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