

# Indiana workers denounce fraudulent UAW run-off election

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There is widespread anger among United Auto Workers members over the current election for UAW president and the supposed “choice” between two longtime UAW bureaucrats, incumbent President Ray Curry and UAW International Representative Shawn Fain. The two emerged after the first round of voting late last year, which was marred by gross violations of workers’ voting rights. This led to a turnout of less than 10 percent, one of the lowest if not the lowest of any major union election in history.

The results of the first round have not been certified because of the official protest filed with the court-appointed UAW Monitor by Will Lehman, a Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president in the first round of voting. His 50-page protest documents how the entrenched UAW leadership defied election rules set by the Monitor, including updating mailing lists and broadly educating workers about the election to maximize participation. To ensure that workers have a meaningful choice—and not one limited to the handpicked candidates of the UAW bureaucracy—Lehman has called for the inclusion of all five of the first-round candidates in the current vote.

After doing as little as possible to publicize the election last year, UAW officials are now sending out mailers and emails, posting signs in the plants and outside union halls informing workers that their mail-in ballots for the runoff must be received by February 28. As for the UAW Monitor, he has not replied to Lehman’s protest and is allowing the illegitimate runoff to continue.

Over the last two weeks, supporters of Will Lehman have traveled to plants in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Illinois and other states to inform workers about his protest. In discussions outside factory gates, supporters have encountered deep opposition among workers to the UAW bureaucracy’s collusion with the auto bosses and brazen violation of their rights in the election.

A worker at the General Motors assembly plant in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, said, “We’re working so hard in the plant the last thing we’re thinking about is updating our mailing addresses. That is something the union should have attended to.” Pointing to the less than 10 percent turnout, she added, “How can you have an election where 90 percent of the membership didn’t

vote?”

Gary, a Ft. Wayne worker with 28 years, added, “It doesn’t surprise me that the UAW rigged the election. We’ve been ripped off by the union for years. Back in the day, union stewards would stand up and make management back down. They don’t have anything like that anymore. They don’t stand up for us at all.”

Pointing to widespread charges by workers of vote rigging by UAW Local 2209, he said, “One day, we had a local election here and the union officials claimed a whole box of ballots fell off the back of a truck. They re-ran the election, and the ones who were running against the incumbents and were ahead, lost the election.”

Pointing to the contract battle workers will face later this year against GM and the other automakers, he said, “Prices are going up 8, 9 and 10 percent. Where’s my pay raise? We need to fight for more money and hold onto our health benefits. Our retirees should be able to get the medications and treatment they need. I’m appalled with the way Medicare and Medicaid treat our elderly.”

Lehman supporters also spoke to workers at the Stellantis Kokomo Casting Plant in Indiana. “I don’t trust that my vote matters,” Shawn, a veteran worker at the plant, told the WSWS. “I’ve never been asked by any union rep what I want or need or what I feel about the election. It’s almost like they don’t really care about what the workers on the floor want. The election seems like it’s about what the union thinks that we want. I thought that it would be different.

“It’s no secret that the two candidates in the runoff will be against us,” Shawn continued. “It’s always the same kind of people” who make it to the top positions, he said. “Workers know the union isn’t the type of organization it used to be in the 1970’s and earlier.”

Kokomo Casting is where Shawn Fain began his career in the UAW apparatus, starting as a skilled trade representative in UAW Local 1166 in 2001 before working his way up to a top position at the UAW’s Solidarity House headquarters by 2012. As a member of the UAW-Chrysler National Negotiating Team in 2009 and 2011, Fain backed the pro-company contracts that slashed jobs, cut the wages of new hires in half and vastly expanded the use of low-paid temporary workers.

“I got screwed out of the benefits that my dad got,” Shawn said. “Now I know who to blame. Many of us who came here after 2009 don’t even know what our generation has been forced to give up.”

Shawn explained that his father had worked at the factory between 1992 and 2005. “I’ve been here 18 years, and I’m still making what my father and other autoworkers made 20 years ago. We aren’t being compensated anywhere near what the changes in our cost of living have been lately. Since I started working for Stellantis, the cost of living has tripled. Once a year, all we get a pat on the back for keeping up with the output goals.”

He added, “I couldn’t afford a brand new vehicle from Chrysler if I wanted one. To do that I’d have to get rid of my son and move in with my parents,” he said sarcastically. “To get a new Ram pickup you’re paying upwards of \$80,000. So, we’re building transmissions for vehicles that no one can afford? There are workers here making \$17 an hour.”

Shawn continued, “We feel the union doesn’t represent us as much as it represents the companies. I’ll tell you, when we saw (Fiat Chrysler CEO) Sergio Marchionne and our union national president (Dennis Williams) embracing each other during the 2015 negotiations, that left a sour taste in many people’s mouths. We were under the impression that the union was supposed to have an adversarial relationship with the company.”

The 2015 UAW-Chrysler contract was negotiated by UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell, who was imprisoned for taking company bribes, and UAW President Dennis Williams, who was jailed for embezzling union dues. Despite the campaign of threats and intimidation by the UAW bureaucracy, Chrysler workers rejected the first proposal by a 2-1 margin, in the first defeat of a UAW-backed national contract in 33 years.

“Marchionne’s first offer to us was to cap wages at \$25.85 for six years,” Shawn said, which meant Tier-1 would essentially come to the lower rate Tier-2 workers were making. The company and the UAW tried to sell this with a signing bonus, Shawn said, but workers voted no. “Two months later, they came back with the ‘8-year step program,’ which meant you needed to work eight years to get to the top-tier pay rate. After they pushed through this deal, Marchionne got a multi-million dollar bonus, and we got a \$3,000 signing bonus.”

Explaining current conditions, Shawn referred to the abuse of temporary part-time (TPT) workers, or so-called supplemental employees, who pay dues to the UAW but have virtually no rights. “It drives morale way down around here to see temps getting laid off. A lot of us really appreciate what the temps do, and they get treated like crap. They get rolled the hardest and get laid off first. Since temps aren’t guaranteed anything, the company wants as many temps as they can get.

“You’re working side by side with four other guys, and let’s say one of them is a temp. One day, the temp doesn’t show up to work. The next thing you know, three months go by, then

six, and he still isn’t back. So now you’re wondering, why would the company do that? He was a very good employee, and if they can do that to him, when is it going to happen to me?”

“The union negotiated contract with language that gives the company incentives to hire temps. So now you see where the lack of trust in the union comes from. It comes from our experiences. I don’t believe workers are indifferent towards the election. We have a lack of trust in the entire process. We don’t believe that the union is working for us anymore.”

Shawn recounted the experience of Kokomo Casting workers during the three-day “strike” organized by Local 1166 and the UAW International officials in September 2022. Both Ray Curry and Shawn Fain hailed the bogus strike as an example of standing up to the company, but it did nothing to disrupt production and resulted in nothing.

“I was here supporting my brothers and sisters, and I stood out here for four hours. [UAW Vice President] Cindy Estrada and other top UAW officials in charge of the Stellantis team came down here, and they made a show of what a fight they’re putting up. I read their list of demands and felt slapped in the face. According to the union, we went on strike to make sure we had clean microwaves in the lunchroom and not over our low pay and eliminating the tiered pay system. Excuse me, but that’s BS.

“Our dues are supposed to stock up for the things we need when we’re on strike. But they don’t even use it for that. We’re supposed to be able to use that money as leverage against the company during negotiations. But the first problem with that in practice is that we don’t even go on strike anymore. The last time we were allowed to go on strike, it was only for a day, it was a complete waste of time.”

Shawn expressed his support for Will Lehman’s call for the formation of rank-and-file committees, controlled by the workers themselves, to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shopfloor. “We don’t want anyone representing us who is going to put the company first and not us. I will read Will’s protest and discuss this with other workers.”

*To get more information about Will Lehman’s protest and the fight for rank-and-file committees go to: <https://www.willforuawpresident.org> or fill out the form below.*



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