

UAW election crisis continues after Curry acknowledges “rampant disenfranchisement”

Jerry White
19 March 2023

As of Sunday night, the court-appointed monitor overseeing the United Auto Workers election has still not announced the winner of the runoff between challenger Shawn Fain and incumbent UAW President Ray Curry. With a 505-vote lead and only 600 contested ballots left to be resolved, Fain claims he is headed to victory. But the race has not been called yet because the number of challenged ballots still exceeds the margin between the two candidates, according to a statement on the UAW Monitor’s website.

After a two-week delay as 1,600 ballots were challenged, counting resumed last Thursday at the Westin Book Cadillac Hotel in Detroit. After an additional 676 ballots were tabulated, the remaining ballots were resealed and transported back to the original vote counting facility near Dayton, Ohio. The Monitor is “continuing to work with the UAW and Election Vendor to resolve the eligibility status of the individuals who voted the remaining challenged ballots,” the website reported, adding, “The Monitor expects that it will reconvene the vote count again, and will update this page with more information when available.”

Whether Fain or Curry wins it will be with little more than 6 percent of the votes of those eligible to vote. Only 138,267 of the 1.1 million active and retired UAW members cast ballots in the second round and a large percentage of those were union bureaucrats and their cronies. The turnout, one of the lowest of any direct union membership vote, was due to systematic voter suppression by the UAW bureaucracy, along with the deep alienation felt by the great mass of workers from the corrupt union apparatus.

In an extraordinary admission last Friday, Curry’s Solidarity Team acknowledged that the election was marred by “rampant disenfranchisement” and “multiple election violations,” which “call the election into question and require immediate investigation.” These statements were included in a last-minute protest by the Curry team requesting that the Monitor hold off on declaring a winner and organize another runoff election.

The UAW Monitor, Neil Barofsky—a New York attorney and former banking regulator—denied the request Friday night, declaring there “was no basis for such extraordinary action.”

Regardless of its self-serving character, Curry’s protest was a damning admission of how the UAW bureaucracy, with the full

backing of the UAW Monitor, deprived workers of the right to vote in a free and fair election. It is a vindication of the charges made by Will Lehman, the rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president, in the official protest he filed with the Monitor in December 2022 over the undemocratic character of the first round of the elections.

A press release on Curry’s protest points to the “tens of thousands of ballots that were returned as undeliverable,” and the violation of the Monitor’s mandate that “all reasonable efforts” be made to “ensure that active and retired members received actual and written notice of the election.” It asks, “What efforts were made to contact UAW members who did not receive a ballot in the mail?”

The protest further notes that “Eligible voters who did not receive ballots had to make multiple phone calls and wait weeks before receiving ballots. Did voters who did not make multiple calls receive ballots? How many replacement ballot votes were counted out of the total number of replacement ballots issued?”

Lehman cited all of this and far more in his protest to the Monitor and previous lawsuit in federal court. In both cases, however, his legal efforts were rejected, and the federal judge and Monitor allowed this electoral farce to continue.

Curry’s team tries to make a crude distinction between the two rounds of voting, stating, “Unlike the election last fall, the numerous questions surrounding rampant disenfranchisement of UAW voters as well as the alleged campaign violations clearly could have affected the outcome of the run-off election...”

In other words, “rampant disenfranchisement” by the bureaucracy was fine when it kept workers from learning about and voting for Will Lehman, a socialist candidate who calls for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy and the transfer of power to the workers on the shop floor. Nevertheless, Lehman won nearly 5,000 votes and there is no doubt he would have received tens of thousands more if 90 percent of the membership had not been disenfranchised.

For his part, Shawn Fain, a long time UAW International bureaucrat and former member of Curry’s Administrative Caucus, is more than willing to take power based on this fraudulent election. His Unite All Workers for Democracy

“reform slate,” backed by the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and other pseudo-left organizations, is set to take over the majority on the UAW International Executive Board. While it may employ different rhetoric from Curry & Co., a Fain-led administration will pursue a pro-capitalist and pro-war policy, leading to an immediate conflict with rank-and-file workers determined to recoup decades of UAW-backed concessions, particularly as inflation ravages their paychecks.

As Lehman said in a statement last week, “Fain’s opposition to giving rank-and-file workers a meaningful right to vote shows his faction is no different from Curry’s in its hostility to the interests and democratic rights of rank-and-file workers.”

It is highly significant that former UAW President Bob King intervened last week to urge the Monitor to reject Curry’s protest and settle the election before the UAW convenes its Special Bargaining Convention on March 27. In a letter to Barofsky last Friday, King encouraged the Monitor to complete the runoff process as soon as possible, saying any delay would be “detrimental” to “full preparation for the upcoming bargaining.” It is in “the interest of the membership,” King says, to swear in the next president before the bargaining convention and for all candidates to “come together in unity to work to get the best possible contracts...”

King, like the auto executives themselves, knows workers are fed up with worsening inflation and conditions and are being radicalized by the diversion of resources to endless bank bailouts and war preparations. While the UAW election showed there is no popular support for any section of the UAW bureaucracy, the program fought for by Will Lehman is being welcomed by workers at Caterpillar, Dana and other corporations, who are building a growing network of rank-and-file committees, aligned with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

In 2009, Ford workers rejected by 70 to 30 percent a contract pushed by then-UAW Vice President King that would have banned strikes, expanded the two-tier wage system and frozen wages. He was selected to be UAW international president the following year and declared in his acceptance speech that “The 21st-century UAW no longer views these managements as our adversaries or enemies, but as partners,” whose relationship is built “upon a foundation of respect, shared goals, and a common mission.” In 2012, King appointed Fain as a UAW Chrysler Department international representative.

Autoworkers who spoke to the WSWS expressed their disgust over the UAW election.

A Pennsylvania worker at the Dana parts plant said, “Curry is doing it because he may lose. All throughout the election, there’s been no communication at all from the local. The only place I receive updates about it have been from the Lehman campaign.”

Greg, part-time temporary worker at GM Flint Assembly, said, “The Curry team’s election protest is a total farce. Where were they in November when Will Lehman sued the federal

Monitor for the same things in their protest? They were nowhere to be seen supporting Will’s protest or acknowledging its existence back in December. After all, it was the Curry team themselves that created the situation responsible for the disenfranchisement of voting UAW members! How can they claim to care about the legitimacy of the election when Curry’s team did everything they could to suppress and limit knowledge of the first election?

“Of course, now that the only two candidates are Curry and Fain, the Curry team is making this protest to try to win favor among workers and maintain their faction of the UAW bureaucracy. They do not care about the rank-and-file workers. Fain and Brian Keller’s comments also show the character of the whole UAW bureaucracy. A lot of workers at my plant voted for Keller because they thought he represented a true opposition to the UAW bureaucracy. No one should believe this given he not only endorsed Fain but backed him up to oppose both Will’s original protest and Curry’s one. Just like Curry, Fain and Keller represent the corrupt UAW leadership, just a different faction of it, equally opposed to the rank-and-file working UAW members. They want the election over and done with.”

“Curry’s statement is especially hypocritical considering it was his entire franchise that deliberately caused every single one of the problems,” Amy, a full-time GM Flint Assembly worker for five years, said. “Whether Fain or Curry finally wins, it will not impact the workers favorably. The Big 3 contract which expires in September will impact both active and retired workers. With inflation driving up the cost to live, and the growing economic crisis, and billions spent for war, the UAW bureaucrats will be trying to force us to cut benefits and wages. They only serve the big auto companies, not the workers. Looks like they may be going into their bargaining convention without a president and without support from the rank and file. A good majority of workers did not even get to participate in the first round because Curry and the rest suppressed the vote.”

“I urge all workers to be involved as much as they can. Stand up and say this is not okay! It’s not fair! The imposition of a sellout contract at Caterpillar without allowing workers to review it before voting and the firings of dozens of Dana workers with the complicity of the UAW shows things are bad. The worst is yet to come unless workers come together to build the rank-and-file committees.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact