

UAW Monitor denies Will Lehman protest, disenfranchising hundreds of thousands of rank-and-file members

Eric London
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On Sunday night, the court-appointed Monitor charged with overseeing the UAW national officer's election denied the protest filed in December by rank-and-file autoworker and socialist UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman. Lehman's protest relied on reports submitted by rank-and-file workers across the country to demonstrate that the UAW bureaucracy denied hundreds of thousands of UAW members the right to vote in the election's first round held last fall.

The Monitor's denial, issued on letterhead from the corporate law firm Crowell and Moring and signed by former federal prosecutor Glen McGorty, exemplifies the fraudulent character of the election and reveals the contempt with which the UAW, the federal courts, and the Monitor view the democratic rights of the working class.

In the denial, the Monitor dismissed concerns of low turnout outright, writing, "It is not clear that turnout was 'low,'" even though just 104,766 ballots were counted out of a membership of over one million, roughly 9 percent. The denial does not refute the fact that this is the lowest turnout in a union election in US history, though the Monitor is unconcerned by this, stating that Lehman "does not substantiate how these references [to prior union elections with higher turnout] are useful here."

The Monitor treats evidence submitted by rank-and-file workers as "unsubstantiated" or "vague" while accepting everything the UAW bureaucracy says as true, even though it was the *bureaucracy* that was taking bribes from the companies and lying about it while robbing the *rank-and-file* of their dues money.

The Monitor has not served as the UAW bureaucracy's impartial overseer, but as its accomplice. In the process, a whole network of upper-middle-class parasites have been enriching themselves on workers' dues money while depriving them of their rights. In 2021 alone, Crowell and

Moring was paid \$447,006 in workers' dues money for "monitor duties," while Jenner and Block was paid nearly \$2 million. The Monitor was recommended to the court by former UAW President Rory Gamble.

The Monitor's denial relied heavily on a response submitted by the UAW national office to Lehman's protest. The UAW's unsigned brief states that the UAW's own conduct was "reasonable and lawful" and that it made "exhaustive efforts" to "publicize the election and urge members to vote." The brief turns reality on its head, stating that "there is no evidence of a systematic failure of eligible members to receive ballots."

The UAW's brief denounces Lehman's protest as "conspiratorial speculation" and attacks Lehman for "overlying all of his contentions with references to the prior bad acts" of the UAW leaders convicted of felonies. It accuses Lehman of doing so to "serve Mr. Lehman's political purposes" to "cast aspersions on the entire union by continual backward looks."

But it is the UAW apparatus which casts aspersions on masses of rank-and-file workers by blaming them for refusing to update their information. "There will be union members who will refuse to divulge their home addresses," the brief says, citing a legal case. "Members who have moved may not always provide a new address," it continues, "despite the union's best efforts."

From the start, the UAW election was stage-managed by the state to resolve the crisis in the UAW stemming from the corruption scandal. Its aim was to provide the UAW apparatus with window dressing and to put in place a leadership with enough legitimacy to restrain the brewing rebellion of the rank-and-file. This plan could succeed only insofar as the rank-and-file had no representation on the ballot and could only choose from hand-selected bureaucrats representing different cliques.

Will Lehman's campaign threw a monkey wrench into this plan. Lehman ran on a socialist program and campaigned for abolishing the UAW bureaucracy and giving power to the rank and file on the shop floor. He ran as a member of the International Workers' Alliance for Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and was supported by the Socialist Equality Party and *World Socialist Web Site*.

Despite the Monitor's enacting a hurdle that all candidates must be nominated by UAW officials at its convention, Lehman was nominated and won the right to appear on the ballot.

The response of the bureaucracy and the Monitor was to engage in a systematic effort to suppress turnout for fear of giving rank-and-file workers a chance to vote for Lehman in the first round. They attempted to keep the membership in the dark about the fact that an election was taking place and refused to update their mailing lists so that workers would actually receive ballots.

In November 2022, Lehman sued the UAW and Monitor in federal court, demanding that Judge David Lawson take action to force the UAW to provide notice to the membership that an election was taking place. The Biden administration filed a legal brief siding with the UAW, and Judge Lawson dismissed the case. As a result, turnout was just 9 percent, exactly what Lehman predicted in his lawsuit, and a large portion of the votes cast came from within the apparatus of UAW officials. Lehman won 4,777 votes, a significant portion of the rank-and-file workers who learned about the election, largely through Lehman's campaign itself.

After longtime bureaucrats Ray Curry and Shawn Fain received the most votes in the first round and secured their places in the run-off, the UAW apparatus took steps to inform the membership about the second round, steps it deliberately did not take when Lehman was on the ballot. Despite this, turnout increased only slightly, to 138,000 votes, reflecting indifference among the rank and file at having to choose between two bureaucrats who have each made over \$1 million in salary from workers' dues.

The second round produced a razor-thin margin, with Curry trailing Shawn Fain by roughly 500 votes.

In a desperate move aimed at retaining control over the spoils of the bureaucracy, Curry and his clique of bureaucrats are challenging the results and acknowledging the election was a fraud by raising points previously made by Lehman. On March 16, Curry's campaign issued a statement rejecting the second round as the product of "rampant disenfranchisement" which "calls the election

into question." The next day, the UAW submitted its response calling the first round election lawful and demanding Lehman's protest be dismissed.

The UAW is in a state of extreme crisis, and the bureaucracy is breaking apart. On the eve of the UAW's special bargaining conference and the expiration of contracts for 150,000 Big Three workers, both Curry and Fain are appealing to the state to prove they are most capable of maintaining "stability."

Regardless of who is installed, the leadership that will emerge from this fraudulent election will have no legitimacy whatsoever in the rank and file. Not counting union officials who voted, neither Fain nor Curry won support from more than 3 percent of the rank and file, and the majority of the membership likely still does not know an election took place. The election was intended to provide the bureaucracy with legitimacy, but it has had the opposite impact.

The rank-and-file movement embodied in Lehman's campaign is taking the fight into the next stage. Inflation, the soaring cost of living and stagnant wages are making life impossible, not just for US autoworkers but for workers in all industries around the world.

Major class battles are on the horizon. The state, the capitalist political parties and the trade union bureaucracies intend to force workers to pay for the cost of the financial crisis and the cost of the escalating US/NATO war against Russia. But now a movement of the international working class is emerging, including in France, the UK and Greece, and in Los Angeles, where 40,000 teachers and academic workers went on strike Tuesday in the largest teachers' strike in years.

Linked in a common, international struggle, rank-and-file workers can unleash their tremendous power and fight for what they need, not what the corporations want. Take up the fight for rank-and-file power and join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees today.



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