Demand a new UAW election! All power to the rank and file!

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
4 July 2024

Recent events have made it clear that rank-and-file United Auto Workers members must call for a new election to clear out the discredited Shawn Fain administration and carry out a radical course change to defend their jobs, living standards and basic democratic rights.

On June 25, a federal judge in Michigan ruled that the refusal by the Biden administration's Department of Labor to act on complaints of systematic voter suppression in the 2022 UAW national leadership elections was completely illegitimate.

Judge David Lawson of the Eastern District of Michigan denounced Biden's Labor Department for acting in an "arbitrary and capricious" fashion when it tossed out complaints by rank-and-file autoworker Will Lehman of voter suppression and other violations during the first-ever membership vote for top UAW officers in 2022.

The ruling was all the more significant because the same judge had denied Lehman's request in November 2022 for a one-month extension of the UAW election deadline and to ensure the right to vote for every member. At the time, Lehman presented detailed evidence of how the UAW bureaucracy refused to update mailing addresses and take any meaningful measures to make sure all its members were informed about the election.

This deliberate suppression of votes resulted in the participation of only 9 percent of the 1.1 million active and retired members who were eligible to vote—the lowest percentage of any national union election in US history.

The judge's ruling proves that Lehman and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) were completely correct. UAW members were victims of a massive fraud, rubber-stamped by the Biden administration, which was determined to put its man in the UAW president's office, regardless of what the rank and file wanted. Since being crowned, Fain has acted as Biden's poodle, backing sellout contracts and the president's warmongering policies.

All the claims by Fain and the Unite All Workers for Democracy slate about ending the corruption that sent a dozen UAW officers to jail—including two previous presidents—have also been revealed to be a pack of lies. On June 9, the court-appointed UAW monitor announced he was investigating ongoing corruption in the top leadership, including allegations of misconduct by Fain personally and embezzlement by an unnamed regional director.

Union leaders, the monitor said, were obstructing the investigation by refusing to release tens of thousands of requested documents. If this persisted, the *Detroit Free Press* commented, "it's not beyond the realm of possibility that the monitor could demand Fain's removal."

Eight months after the UAW leadership rammed through its supposed "record" labor agreements, autoworkers are paying a devastating price for the bogus "stand-up" strike and betrayal of their contract struggle. Thousands of part-time workers, who Fain & Co. promised would be converted to full-time positions once the contract was ratified, were instead summarily fired.

Thousands more have been laid off in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana, and the job cuts continue to mount. Meanwhile, those remaining are forced to work 10-12 hour days, six and seven days a week, and punished for taking time off for medical appointments and family emergencies.

The exposure of election fraud, combined with the

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continued sellout of workers' interests and corruption, makes an indisputable case for the holding of a new UAW election.

But workers cannot rely on the Labor Department, the UAW monitor or the courts to defend their rights. If a genuinely democratic election is to be held, rank-and-file workers must fight for it and oversee it.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees calls on workers in every factory and workplace to build rank-and-file election committees to raise the demand for a new election and put the structures in place to guarantee its legitimacy. This means holding mass meetings to nominate the most trusted and militant workers, the organization of election committees to ensure the dissemination of information and guarantee the right of every UAW member to vote, and the exercise of rank-and-file oversight of ballot counting.

During his election campaign, Will Lehman warned that the replacement of one bureaucrat with another would do nothing to empower the rank and file. Instead of reforming the bureaucracy, Lehman said, workers have to abolish it and transfer power and decision making from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor.

The only way a re-vote will not produce another corporate-government stooge is if this process is connected to the fight to construct new organs of independent self-determination of workers themselves.

The demand for new elections must be connected to the fight to overturn the sellout contracts and fight all layoffs and plant closures. Rank-and-file committees must fight for the rehiring of all part-time and full-time workers, a halt to mandatory overtime and weekend work, the expansion of paid time off and the ending of punitive attendance policies.

In opposition to the threats by the auto bosses, including from Stellantis CEO Carlos Tavares, to shift production to "best cost countries" and pit workers against each other in a race to the bottom, the network of autoworkers' rank-and-file committees in the US, facilitated by the IWA-RFC, must coordinate the fight to defend jobs and living standards with workers around the world.

There will be powerful support for this fight. This was demonstrated in the campaign of Will Lehman himself. Running as a socialist and fighter for the international unity of the working class, Lehman won nearly 5,000 votes in factories, universities and workplaces across the country, despite the disenfranchisement of 90 percent of the UAW membership.

A powerful movement from below has emerged over the last several years, in which the most class-conscious workers fighting to build this rank-and-file movement are playing a decisive role. This includes the joint actions of US and Mexican GM workers in 2019, the wave of wildcat strikes against the spread of COVID-19 that shut down the auto industry in March 2020, the Volvo Trucks and John Deere strikes in 2021, and the spread of rank-and-file committees at Caterpillar, Dana, Clarios, GM, Ford and Stellantis since 2022.

The strike by tens of thousands of academic workers at the University of California earlier this year expressed the entry of the working class as the central political force to oppose war and state repression. The strike, opposing the genocide in Gaza and the crackdown on campus protests, sparked fear in ruling circles that the UAW bureaucracy would not be able to contain the broad opposition to war in the working class.

The demand for new UAW elections will strengthen the movement for rank-and-file power and provide an impulse to the building of alternative structures to the pro-capitalist and pro-war bureaucracies.

As the US presidential contest and the state sanctioning of the rigged UAW election shows, the ruling class is utterly hostile to the democratic rights of the working class. The widening gulf between the rich and the poor and the escalation of deeply unpopular imperialist wars require the establishment of the most authoritarian forms of rule, as the Supreme Court's ruling sanctioning a presidential dictatorship shows. That is why the fight for fundamental rights today is inseparably bound up with the extension of workers' democracy and the fight for socialism.

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