

Judge gives US government deadline to comply with order in Will Lehman's UAW elections case

Our reporter
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Ruling in favor of rank-and-file autoworker Will Lehman, a federal judge has ordered the U.S. Department of Labor to finally produce its “statement of reasons” for rejecting his challenge to the 2022-23 UAW International Executive Board elections, which he contends were characterized by widespread suppression of the votes of rank-and-file members and retirees by UAW officials.

The ruling, issued September 24 by Judge David Lawson of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan, sets an October 31 deadline for the government to provide its explanation, more than a year after it was first ordered to do so.

The order came after government attorneys admitted in their formal answer to Lehman's most recent complaint that they still had not complied with the order in Lehman's favor from June of last year. On August 1, the Department of Labor issued a brief “letter of decision” and said at that time that a “statement of reasons” would be forthcoming. The Trump administration evidently made the decision to reject Lehman's complaint before any written statement of reasons for doing so existed.

In an order dated September 24, Judge Lawson noted the government's delay and set October 31 as a binding deadline. He further ruled that Lehman, if he wishes, may file an amended complaint by November 14 once the government's reasons are made public. This ruling effectively grants Lehman what he sought in the most recent lawsuit, namely an order for the government to comply with the law and do what it was ordered to do more than 450 days ago.

Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and former candidate for UAW president, filed a lawsuit in September 2023

after the Biden administration refused to rerun the election despite overwhelming evidence of voter suppression and disenfranchisement. In that election, barely 9 percent of the membership cast ballots, with more than 90 percent of UAW members excluded through the deliberate suppression of notices and ballots.

In June 2024, Judge Lawson issued what Bloomberg Law described as a “rare rebuke” of the Labor Department. He found that the Biden administration had acted “arbitrarily and capriciously” in throwing out Lehman's complaint on narrow procedural grounds. Lawson ordered the department to reopen the case and, at minimum, produce a supplemental statement of reasons why his complaint was being denied.

Instead, both the Biden and Trump administrations have stonewalled. For more than a year, the government failed to comply with Lawson's order. In early September, government attorneys admitted in court filings that no statement of reasons had yet been produced, even while arguing that Lehman's lawsuit was “premature” because there was not yet an official decision to review. This Catch-22 was transparently aimed at running out the clock until the next UAW election in 2026, nullifying Lawson's ruling and shielding the union bureaucracy.

The UAW has been under federal supervision since 2021, when a consent decree was imposed following a corruption scandal that sent more than a dozen top officials to prison. Direct elections of officers were hailed as a “reform,” but in practice the 2022-23 vote was manipulated to keep power in the hands of the apparatus. Shawn Fain, a longtime UAW bureaucrat, emerged as president and has since carried out one

betrayal after another.

Fain's record includes the 2023 "stand-up strikes" at the Big Three auto companies, staged in close collaboration with the Biden White House, which left most workers on the job and paved the way for mass layoffs. Since then, thousands of UAW members have lost their jobs. The UAW leadership has also aligned itself openly with Trump's protectionist trade war policies.

Lehman, who ran as a socialist candidate for UAW president in 2022 and won nearly 5,000 votes despite the suppression of turnout, has argued that the bureaucracy cannot be reformed. His campaign called for the abolition of the apparatus and the transfer of decision-making power to rank-and-file workers through independent committees.

Responding to the latest decision by Lawson, Lehman said, "The court has just ruled in my favor, giving a deadline for the government to comply with the law and take the elementary step of actually providing reasons for rejecting my complaint over the blatant defects in the 2022 elections.

"The whole course of this lawsuit, which was the third I have had to file, demonstrates the absurd lengths to which rank-and-file workers must go just to have their complaints addressed, even when they are entitled to answers by law. The government's repeated delays expose its contempt for the democratic rights of workers and the extent to which the deck is stacked in favor of the bureaucracy and against the rights of the rank and file.

"Throughout the election and afterwards, my campaign exposed and protested against the widespread disenfranchisement of rank-and-file workers and retirees, which was the result of the deliberate refusal of the union to notify its members that an election was taking place. The turnout was low, not because of 'apathy,' as the union bureaucrats claimed, but because so many workers did not know an election was happening at all. This is an issue I have been fighting to raise for three years on behalf of all rank-and-file members and retirees, who have a right to participate in elections and whom the bureaucrats tried to keep in the dark.

"For more than a year, under Biden and now under Trump, the Department of Labor has stonewalled and slow-walked. This completely exposes the fraudulent

claim that Trump is 'pro-worker.' Just like Biden before him, Trump is defending the corporations and the compromised union apparatus while carrying out a war on workers, dismantling social programs on behalf of the oligarchy and establishing a presidential dictatorship.

"Workers should draw the conclusion that they cannot rely on the government or the union bureaucracy to defend their rights. That task falls to rank-and-file workers themselves, and we are looking ahead to defending those rights in the 2026 UAW elections and beyond."



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