

Trump's US Labor Department whitewashes UAW election fraud that installed Shawn Fain

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The US Department of Labor (DOL) has issued a 36-page document defending one of the most undemocratic union elections in US history: The 2022–23 vote for top UAW officers. Its October 31 “Supplemental Statement of Reasons” dismisses the complaint of Will Lehman, a socialist Mack Trucks worker and candidate for UAW president in 2022, who documented mass disenfranchisement in the government-supervised election that installed Shawn Fain.

The report was released only after a federal judge in Michigan repeatedly ordered both the Biden and Trump administrations to reply. It justifies every abuse committed by the UAW bureaucracy. It portrays an election in which fewer than 9 percent of 1.1 million members voted as the product of “reasonable efforts” by the UAW to ensure the right to vote and support candidates of their choice. That 91 percent of the members were effectively excluded did not overturn the DOL’s conclusion that “no violations occurred that may have affected the outcome of the election.”

Lehman’s complaint exposed how the UAW deliberately failed to inform members of the election, refused to update mailing lists and allowed tens of thousands of ballots to go undelivered. The DOL’s response repeats, almost word-for-word, the defenses offered by the bureaucracy itself.

In a statement responding to the DOL’s decision, Will Lehman said:

This report proves that the government, the UAW bureaucracy, and the corporations are part of one system of control. The Department of Labor admits that my reports were true—that tens of thousands never received ballots and that only 1 in 10 workers voted—yet declares this meaningless because it supposedly did not affect the outcome. UAW members and retirees will recognize this as a violation of logic and common sense that serves to ratify violations of their rights.

One of the most remarkable passages in the DOL’s document concerns its supposed “investigation” into whether members were informed of the election. Instead of interviewing workers or reviewing the more than 100 statements provided by Lehman and his attorney documenting widespread confusion and disenfranchisement, the Department relied entirely on a small telephone and email survey of local UAW officers.

These officials—many of whom owed their positions to the same apparatus controlling the election—assured investigators that they had posted notices and discussed the vote at meetings. The DOL accepted these self-serving assertions without question and concluded that the

UAW made “reasonable efforts to maintain an accurate mailing list, provide notice of the election to members’ last known home addresses, and provide reasonable opportunity to vote.” It ignored the overwhelming contrary evidence submitted by Lehman, including sworn statements from workers across the country who never received ballots, never heard of the election until it was over, or were told by local officers that temporary and part-time employees were ineligible to vote.

In other words, the DOL accepted the word of the officials accused of suppressing the election while disregarding the testimony of those disenfranchised by them. The result is a document that turns the meaning of “investigation” on its head.

In some locals, turnout was almost nonexistent. At the University of California’s academic locals, which represent over 48,000 graduate and research workers, barely 2 percent cast ballots. At the University of Washington’s Local 4121, only 3 percent voted. Yet the DOL insists these figures prove nothing, asserting that “low voter turnout in and of itself does not constitute an independent LMRDA [Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act] violation.” It cites a 1970s precedent requiring proof of a “significantly reduced turnout compared to previous elections,” though there had never before been a direct election of UAW officers.

The DOL argues that a few brief mentions in *Solidarity Magazine*, the UAW website and local union notices constituted a “widely publicized” election, going so far as to claim the “UAW exceeded the LMRDA’s election notice requirements to its membership.”

Dismissing Lehman’s reports of election violations, the DOL hides behind the fraudulent argument that none of it “may have affected the outcome.” This sophistry renders the right to vote meaningless. Even if hundreds of thousands were denied ballots, the Department claims the result must stand unless Lehman could prove that the number of excluded voters in each case of disenfranchisement, not in aggregate, exceeded the margin between Fain and Ray Curry (the incumbent). By this logic, the smaller the participation, the safer the bureaucracy’s victory.

Lehman’s campaign was systematically obstructed by UAW officials who acted as enforcers for management. At multiple factories—including GM plants in Michigan, Indiana, Missouri and Texas; Ford plants in Michigan and Kansas; Detroit area Stellantis plants; auto parts factories in Ohio and Kentucky; Daimler and Volvo truck plants in North Carolina and Virginia—his supporters distributed campaign leaflets without interference from management until UAW officials alerted company security, which then dispatched guards to expel them.

The DOL endorses this collaboration, asserting “there was no

evidence that the election rules or other applicable rules prohibited UAW representatives from reporting campaigning to the employer” or that “UAW representatives improperly caused your supporters’ removal from the worksites.”

It claims there was no evidence of “subjecting members” to “penalty, discipline, or improper interference or reprisal of any kind,” even though union officials photographed rank-and-file workers who stopped to speak to Lehman and his supporters. The Department even cites case law suggesting that harassment or intimidation by union officials may constitute “protected speech.”

In regards to the UAW’s harassment of Lehman’s supporters at the Volvo New River Valley Plant in Dublin, Virginia on October 17, 2022, the DOL states:

Even if the union improperly interfered with permissible campaigning on public property, such a potential violation would not have affected the outcome of the election. Even if all 3,918 UAW members at the plant had voted for you in addition to the 4,777 votes you received in the general election, you would not have been able to surpass either of the top candidates in the president’s race: Curry (39,572 votes) and Fain (38,598 votes).

During the official UAW presidential debate, former *New York Times* correspondent Steven Greenhouse, acting as moderator, falsely attributed a quote to Lehman saying he was seeking to “abolish the UAW” rather than its bureaucracy. The DOL attorneys dismissed Lehman’s charges that the debate was unfair since Greenhouse did not attribute false statements to any of the candidates—declaring without merit that “there was no evidence that the moderator appeared to favor or disfavor any individual candidate.”

The 2022–23 vote took place under a federal consent decree following the exposure of a bribery and embezzlement conspiracy that sent two former UAW presidents and more than a dozen top officials to prison. Its stated purpose was to restore “democracy and accountability” through a direct vote. In reality, the election was designed to launder the union’s image while preserving its corporate apparatus intact.

The UAW monitor, the department and the courts functioned to protect the bureaucracy from accountability.

The DOL claims it is guided by the principle of ensuring “free and democratic elections” without “departing needlessly from [Congress] longstanding policy against unnecessary government intrusion into internal union affairs.” This is a fraud. The real purpose of the government intervention was to preserve a bureaucratic caste that the capitalist state relies upon to control the working class.

The outcome was the installation of Shawn Fain, a 30-year functionary whose conduct since has confirmed the election’s purpose. In 2023, he orchestrated the so-called “stand-up strike,” which left the overwhelming majority of autoworkers on the job and produced concessionary contracts written with the Biden administration’s input. Fain campaigned for Biden and Harris, claiming the warmongers of the Democratic Party were defenders of the working class and calling Trump a “scab.”

After Trump’s return to power in 2025, Fain pivoted seamlessly, praising the administration’s tariffs and war policies and pledging to make the UAW “a partner in rebuilding American industry.” As

Trump deploys troops into US cities against “the enemy within,” Fain has become one of his most reliable allies in enforcing labor discipline under the banner of economic nationalism and wartime unity.

Under Biden, the UAW and other unions were called upon to police the workforce amid strikes and to enforce “labor peace” during the administration’s rearmament drive. Under Trump, the same apparatus is indispensable for imposing his trade-war program and the “total war” dictatorship demanded by American imperialism.

In his statement responding to the DOL’s decision, Lehman explained:

Workers were denied their right to vote, to hear an oppositional program, and to organize independently. Those who fought for the transfer of power to the rank and file were slandered, censored and driven from factory gates. The DOL’s decision is part of the broader suppression of democratic rights now being carried out by the Trump administration with the full support of the union apparatus.

Lehman called for a turn to the working class itself:

Real democracy will not come through the courts or the Labor Department. It requires abolishing the bureaucratic structure that enforces corporate rule. Workers must establish rank-and-file committees to control production and safety, to defend jobs and to link their struggles internationally.

He emphasized that the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) provides the framework for this fight:

The factories today are run as corporate dictatorships, enforced by the UAW bureaucracy. To break this dictatorship, workers must expand the IWA-RFC, unite across borders, and build a socialist movement against war, inequality and the capitalist system that both parties defend.



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