Raymond Jensen suspended from UAW, barred from ever running for office over threat to Will Lehman

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5 August 2026

Raymond L. Jensen Jr., a paid organizer for the United Auto Workers (UAW) International, was stripped of his membership for two years and barred for life from union office on August 4, after the court-appointed Monitor ruled that his Facebook post threatening the life of socialist UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman broke federal election rules. The sanctions are without precedent in the UAW's history and represent a significant political victory for the working class.

Monitor Neil Barofsky found that the post violated Rule 4-4 of the 2026 election rules, which prohibits threats, intimidation, retaliation and reprisals of any kind. Under the stipulation Jensen signed, he is also barred from taking part in the campaign of any candidate this year and must apologize directly to Lehman. Barofsky sustained in its entirety the complaint brought by Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker, and his attorney.

Jensen is an organizer in the UAW's Department of Bargaining Strategy and the former assistant director of Region 9, Lehman's own region, paid roughly $202,000 last year. On July 16 he went to Lehman's public Facebook page, where the candidate had posted a campaign statement on the criminal investigation of UAW President Shawn Fain by federal prosecutors, and put up an AI-generated image showing Lehman bound and gagged, blood dripping from his mouth, while a masked figure held a rifle to his back. The Monitor's investigators interviewed him five days later, when he acknowledged that the account and the post belonged to him.

Barofsky did not act on his own initiative. He acted because rank-and-file workers intervened to oppose this death threat against Lehman from a UAW bureaucrat. Autoworkers gave video interviews at Stellantis Warren Truck and Sterling Stamping and at Bridgewater Interiors in Detroit. Opposing the death threat, last month a young worker at Bridgewater told Lehman's campaign team, "They're trying to shut you up," and added, "they usually only do that when somebody's telling the truth." Thomas, a worker at Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the top officials "basically have a Mafia mentality." Camille, a former auto parts worker in Detroit, said any worker who posted such an image would be fired on the spot, noting: "I saw people get fired for less."

Support for Lehman was sent to the WSWS from workers at Dana and Nexteer, from a UPS driver, from autoworkers in Jalisco and Guanajuato, Mexico, from postal workers and NHS staff in Britain, from workers in Canada and Australia, and from New Zealand students. Many of these statements and others were undoubtedly sent directly to the Monitor. In a statement issued Wednesday, Lehman credited the intervention of rank-and-file workers internationally with forcing the outcome and explained what the image had been calculated to accomplish:

> The posting of a bound and gagged candidate was intended to teach a lesson to every worker who has voted down a contract, spoken up at a meeting, or thought about challenging the apparatus in their own local: this is what happens to you.
>
> I was the target, but I was never the only one. Workers face threats and intimidation from the union bureaucracies all the time. Antwiane Sanders was recently fired at Nexteer for standing up to UAW officials in his own plant. Workers are victimized, isolated and driven out of their jobs for opposing this apparatus, in plants across this

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> country, week after week, and almost none of it is ever investigated or penalized. Most of those workers have no lawyer and no campaign behind them. That is the real climate in this union, and one finding does not change it.

The threats originate at the top. At the July 30 UAW presidential candidates' debate, Fain said nothing about the image until Lehman raised it from the floor. Saying, "I don't condone that stuff," Fain quickly added: "If you're running for president, get ready, brother, because you'll be getting them every day." This was effectively a doubling down of the threat against Lehman. No member of the International Executive Board has repudiated the image in the three weeks since it appeared. Fain and the apparatus he heads have paid no penalty, but they have suffered a political exposure that no press operation can undo, with ballots going out to the membership later this month.

Lehman warned against drawing the conclusion that workers can look to the state for protection, saying:

> No worker should conclude from this that our protection lies with the Monitor, the Labor Department or the courts. It does not. The Monitor's office exists only because this apparatus stole from its own members on a scale that sent more than a dozen officials to prison, including two former presidents. It did not prevent that corruption, and it has not stopped the victimization of workers who speak out.

The history cited by Lehman's attorney Eric Lee in his letter to the Monitor's office establishes the point. In 1969, union dissident Jock Yablonski ran for president of the United Mine Workers against President Tony Boyle, and his attorneys filed complaint after complaint with the Labor Department documenting the apparatus's use of union funds and staff against him. The department did nothing. On December 31, gunmen hired with money from the union treasury shot Yablonski, his wife Margaret and his 25-year-old daughter Charlotte in their beds. Boyle was convicted of ordering the murders. Only in March 1970 did the Labor Department move to overturn the election.

Lehman closed his statement by drawing out what workers should do with the victory they have won:

> The Monitor has penalized Jensen, but the apparatus remains. The task of abolishing the apparatus and carrying out a fight for what we need is the task of the rank and file.
>
> So take this campaign forward. Vote for me in October, but do more than vote. Build a rank-and-file committee where you work, independent of the apparatus and answerable to no one but the workers who elect it. Link it to the committees at Nexteer, at American Axle, at Bridgewater, and to workers in Mexico and Canada and beyond. There is a rebellion already underway in this union, in the contract rejections and the strikes and the anger on every shift. Deepen it. Organize it. Make it something the apparatus cannot threaten its way out of.

Nothing in this outcome was bestowed on workers by the legal apparatus. Rule 4-4 was in force the day the image appeared, and it was enforced only because workers on three continents made Jensen's threat a political question that could not be buried. Pressure exerted through a body appointed by a federal court can compel one penalty against one functionary; it cannot touch the bureaucratic interests that produced the threat. That requires the independent organization of the rank and file in committees in every plant, linked internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), and the building of the Socialist Equality Party.

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