Federal monitor allows UAW official who issued death threat against Will Lehman to collect his $200,000 salary

Jerry White
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More than a month after a high-ranking official of the United Auto Workers (UAW), Raymond Jensen, posted a death threat against Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president, that official remains an employee of the UAW International, drawing a salary of $202,000 a year from the dues of the membership.

Lehman reported on X that, late last week, a lawyer for the court-appointed Monitor overseeing the UAW informed his legal team that "the Union is presently considering next steps with respect to Mr. Jensen's employment." Lehman's team was told to contact the UAW Legal Department "if you have any further questions about their process."

That is, the Monitor, vested by a federal court with sweeping disciplinary powers, has handed the fate of a self-confessed author of a death threat to the apparatus headed by UAW President Shawn Fain—the man whose re-election campaign badge Raymond Jensen Jr. still has on his Facebook page, and on whose behalf the threat was made.

The facts of the case are not in dispute. On July 16, Jensen—until recently the assistant director of UAW Region 9, Lehman's own region, and currently an "organizer" in the UAW International's Department of Bargaining Strategy—posted an AI-generated image on Lehman's public campaign Facebook page. It depicted Lehman bound and gagged, blood running from his mouth, with a masked gunman aiming a rifle at his back. Jensen posted it in direct response to a statement on the federal criminal investigation into Fain.

Lehman's attorney informed the Monitor's office, demanding a full investigation. Lehman and his supporters also waged a campaign in the plants, and workers in Canada, Mexico and around the world demanded action.

On August 4, the Monitor said its investigation, which included an interview with Jensen, had found that his action violated the election rules' prohibition on "any threats, intimidation, retaliation... or improper interference or reprisal of any kind."

The Monitor claimed that it had determined a penalty "to reflect the seriousness of his conduct and to deter similar misconduct by others." It stipulated, and Jensen agreed to, a two-year suspension from UAW membership, a permanent ban on him running for any elected union position, a prohibition on campaigning for any candidate in this election cycle, and making a formal apology to Lehman.

Workers welcomed the sanctions and drew the obvious conclusion that Jensen would not be allowed to continue his position as a UAW "organizer." This is clearly what "suspension from the UAW" implied, and any worker who issued a death threat would be immediately terminated from their position.

According to the UAW, however, Jensen can be "suspended" as a UAW member while remaining employed by the UAW. Indeed, the only practical consequence is that Jensen no longer has to pay union dues. In other words, an official who violated federal election rules and likely federal criminal law will not only continue to be fully paid, but also receive a bonus!

The Monitor cannot claim it lacks the power to do more. The 2021 consent decree gives it "the authority and duty to bring disciplinary charges against individuals," including the power to fine them, strip their benefits or "otherwise discipline" them. When it found last December that Fain's chief of staff, Chris

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Brooks, had conspired with Fain to strip Secretary-Treasurer Margaret Mock of her duties and then lied to its investigators, Brooks was removed from his position within two weeks. Lying to the Monitor is evidently a firing offense. Threatening to shoot the opposition candidate is a personnel matter, under review.

The apparatus, for its part, has rallied around one of its own. Confronted by Lehman over the death threat at the July 30 candidates' debate, Fain declared, "I don't condone that stuff," before immediately adding: "If you're running for president, get ready, brother, because you'll be getting them every day."

Only after Jensen was sanctioned did Fain issue an internal memo to the International Executive Board declaring that "comments and social media posts of a threatening nature have no place in our union." The memo, addressed to the officialdom rather than the membership, disciplined no one. Fain has taken no action of any kind against the man who made the death threat while campaigning for him.

Threats, Fain instructed the UAW executives, "have no place in our union." The men who make them, however, still have a place on the payroll.

Lehman announced that he had refused to take part in the closing act of this charade: a closed-door meeting at which Jensen was to deliver his required apology, staged while Jensen remains on the payroll. As Lehman explained in a statement, "A closed-door apology under these conditions is not accountability. It is theater, staged so that the Monitor and the apparatus can declare the matter closed while nothing has been done."

He also called on workers to demand that Jensen be removed from his position and taken off the payroll. "If the apparatus is allowed to quietly retain him," he stated, "every functionary in the union will draw the obvious lesson: threats against the rank and file carry no cost."

Certain truths emerge from this episode and the response to it.

First, the character of the apparatus. As Lehman has insisted from the beginning, the threat was never about just himself. It was the answer to rank-and-file opposition of the apparatus—an organization of 560 functionaries taking home more than $100,000 a year, which has presided over decades of concessions, plant closures and the deaths of workers, and which cannot answer opposition with arguments.

Jensen's image only put into a picture what workers confront every day from an apparatus that functions as an arm of corporate management: the 'toxic climate of retribution' the Monitor itself found Fain to have presided over, and the contempt for every worker who votes down a contract, raises a question at a meeting or dares to run against it.

Second, the role of the Monitor. Acting on behalf of the capitalist state, it functions not to democratize the UAW but to protect the apparatus—certifying an election in which Fain was installed with the votes of 6 percent of the membership, and now leaving Jensen's paycheck in Fain's hands.

Third, the bureaucracy cannot be reformed, whether from within or by federal oversight. It must be abolished, and settling accounts with it is the task of rank-and-file workers themselves. That is the significance of Lehman's campaign: not to occupy an office at Solidarity House, but to develop a movement of the rank and file—committees in every plant, controlled by workers themselves, linked across industries and borders, with power transferred to the shop floor.

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