

UAW election debacle: More than 90 percent of members boycott vote, as apparatus reinstalls Fain

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The 2026 election of officers of the United Auto Workers has ended in a debacle for the union bureaucracy. More than 90 percent of the membership boycotted the vote. With the entire apparatus of the union at his disposal, Shawn Fain has been “re-elected” with the votes of 6 percent of the members.

Two opposed tendencies found expression in the election. Fain represented the bureaucratic inertia of the apparatus, which closed ranks behind him. Will Lehman, the socialist Mack Trucks worker who ran for president, represented the development of a rank-and-file rebellion and a growing socialist and internationalist orientation in the working class. Under conditions in which his campaign was effectively barred from reaching the membership, the vote he received is of great significance.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has examined the tally sheets released by the court-appointed Monitor, region by region and local by local. A more detailed analysis will be provided in the coming days, but here are some of the most salient facts:

- Roughly 1.1 million active and retired members were eligible to vote. Only 98,029 ballots were counted, a turnout of 8.9 percent, with 97,043 votes cast for president. More than 1 million members, nine out of every 10, did not vote.

- Fain received 66,166 votes. That is 68 percent of the votes cast for president, but only 6 percent of the membership, about one member in 17. It is fewer than he received in the 2023 runoff. Even this figure includes the votes of the thousands of officials, staff and appointees whose positions depend on the apparatus.

- In 2022, in the union’s first direct election of officers, 104,776 ballots were cast, with 103,495 votes for president. That was already the lowest turnout of any national union election in American history. This year, after Fain’s first term in office, about 6,700 fewer members voted.

- In 2022, the two factions of the leadership, around then-president Ray Curry and around Fain, together received 78,530 votes in the first round. This year Fain and his vice president, Rich Boyer, who ran against him, received 79,034, almost exactly the same. The vote of the apparatus held steady while the membership stayed away.

- The number of ballots fell in seven of the union’s nine regions. In Region 9A, covering New York and New England, it fell by nearly half, from 4,492 to 2,346. It fell 17 percent in Region 8, 14 percent in Region 4 and 11 percent in Region 1A. The only

substantial increase was in Region 6, in the West. It came almost entirely from academic workers at the University of California, whose local’s vote doubled but remained a tiny fraction of its membership.

- In Regions 1 and 1A, the Detroit metropolitan area and the historic center of the union, 26,380 votes were cast out of more than 300,000 active and retired members, under 9 percent. Fain received about 16,800 of them, fewer than 6 percent of the members of the two regions. At Local 600, which includes the Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn, 2,999 votes were cast out of 24,006 members, about 12 percent. Fain received 2,280, fewer than one in 10 of the local’s members.

- At Local 155 in Warren, Michigan, which includes Dana, Magna and other low-paid parts workers, 273 votes were cast out of more than 5,600 members, under 5 percent. At Local 2093, the American Axle plant in Three Rivers, Michigan, where the UAW shut down a strike by nearly 1,000 workers in June, only 179 votes were cast.

- Of the 420 locals that returned any ballots, half cast 63 votes or fewer for president, and 190 cast fewer than 50. The 50 largest locals accounted for more than half of all votes cast.

- Among academic workers at Columbia University, roughly 3,000 members cast 29 ballots, less than 1 percent. This is where the UAW intervened to block strike action over war and the attack on democratic rights. More than 4,000 graduate workers at Harvard went on strike this spring. In the union election five months later, their local cast 53 ballots, about 1 percent of the membership and down from 308 in 2022.

- These figures overstate participation. The vote totals for each local include retirees, who make up a majority of the eligible membership, while the membership figures cited count only active workers. Participation among workers in the plants was lower still. At the same time, there is deep discontent among the hundreds of thousands of retirees also eligible to vote.

The conclusion from these facts is unavoidable. They document the isolation of a bureaucracy that has no roots among the workers it claims to represent. Rank-and-file workers regard it with indifference and hostility.

Fain’s supporters will attribute this to apathy. This is a lie. The election took place after a summer of rebellion in the parts plants. At Nexteer in Saginaw, Michigan, workers rejected three tentative

agreements and voted by 86 percent to strike. The UAW buried the strike vote and pushed through a fourth agreement in a vote held inside the plant, on company property. Workers at Dana and Bridgewater rejected UAW-backed contracts by wide margins.

When workers were asked to vote on contracts, they turned out to reject them. When they were asked to vote for the leadership of the union that imposed those contracts, they stayed away.

Another factor is that many workers simply did not know an election was taking place or did not receive ballots. In 2022, Lehman provided evidence to a federal court, the Monitor and the Labor Department that masses of workers never received ballots and did not know an election was taking place. Nothing was done, and this year workers again reported problems getting ballots. Lehman himself had to request one repeatedly.

For the apparatus, the election served to settle its internal divisions. Facing a growing rebellion, it closed ranks around Fain. He brought figures from the old Administration Caucus onto his United UAW slate, the same layer he had denounced four years ago for selling out members and opposing direct elections by the membership. The pseudo-left factions of the Democratic Party, including the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), also united behind Fain. These forces accept and welcome the exclusion of the membership because their base is the bureaucracy itself.

Lehman's was the only campaign that challenged the apparatus itself. It called for the abolition of the bureaucracy and the transfer of power to rank-and-file committees in the workplaces.

Across the union, Lehman received 1,936 votes, 2 percent of the votes cast for president, down from 4,777 in 2022. He received votes in 293 locals in every region of the union. But the most important fact about his vote is the gap between his total and his vote where workers knew him and his program.

Lehman works at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania. In UAW Local 677, which represents the plant, he won 67 of 301 votes, 22 percent, finishing second to Fain. His share rose from 18.6 percent in 2022, while Fain's fell from 37 to 32 percent.

The decline in Lehman's vote reflects the decline in turnout, which benefited the apparatus, and the conditions under which his campaign was conducted. A series of rules was adopted at the 2022 convention and applied for the first time this year. On the specious grounds that the *World Socialist Web Site* is to be treated as an employer, its support for Lehman was ruled a prohibited contribution. The WSWS was barred from endorsing him. Its *Autoworker Bulletin*, which tens of thousands of workers followed during the 2022 campaign and which was the most important means of reaching them, could not be used to promote the campaign.

Non-members were also barred from contributing "anything of value" to a candidate, while the apparatus had at its disposal the enormous resources of the apparatus itself. These restrictions were aimed directly at Lehman's campaign. They also severely limited its ability to use the costly emails organized through the Monitor, including to inform workers that an election was taking place.

Despite this, Lehman won significant support where his campaign reached workers directly. This includes workers from the Detroit Three, Deere, Caterpillar and Nexteer in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and other states. Among academic

workers at the University of Washington he finished second. At the University of California, he received 285 votes from academic workers, and at Local 1115 he tied for second among California state scientists. In one unit of Local 6000, covering Michigan state employees, he won 7 percent. At the Mack Trucks powertrain plant in Hagerstown, Maryland, he won over 6 percent.

Those who voted for Lehman identified him as a socialist opponent of the apparatus and cast a class-conscious vote. Lehman used the campaign to popularize the fight for rank-and-file power, the international unity of the working class and socialism.

The mass abstention is the clearest indication of the potential support for an alternative. The hundreds of thousands of workers who did not vote want a way to fight. They have drawn the conclusion, in their own way, that the UAW is a union in name only.

Over decades, the UAW has been transformed into an instrument of management and a corporatist arm of the state. Its function is to police the workforce, impose the contracts the corporations demand and suppress opposition.

The election substantiates the position advanced by Lehman and the WSWS: The development of the class struggle requires the formation of new organizations. The opposition of workers will not develop through the reform of this apparatus but through its abolition. That requires new organizations, controlled by workers themselves: rank-and-file committees in every plant and workplace, linked across plants, industries and national borders through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The conclusion that flows necessarily from the UAW election is the imperative to develop such committees, to organize the struggle of autoworkers and other UAW members, and of workers in every industry, whether in a union or not, in the United States and internationally.



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