

Nov. 4, 2020

“The UAW is proud of its democratic heritage. Its Constitution is carefully designed to insure each member her/his full democratic right, both as an individual and through her/his elected representatives, to express her/himself freely and to participate at all levels in the decisions governing the Union. [...]

Each Local Union shall maintain adequate safeguards so that all of its operations shall be conducted in a democratic and fair manner. No corruption, discrimination or anti-democratic procedure shall ever be permitted under any circumstances.”¹

The Graduate Workers of Columbia (GWC)-UAW Local 2110 held elections for the Bargaining Committee on September 8–9, 2020, with results announced on September 10, 2020. We believe that the election process, overseen by Olga Brudastova, a UAW staff member who also supervised the Elections Committee, grossly violated basic democratic norms and principles outlined in the *UAW Constitution*. With this report, we the undersigned hereby bring charges of “conduct unbecoming a member of the Union” against Olga Brudastova.² [UAW's election committee guide](#) offers strong evidence of what is and is not meant by “democratic and fair conduct” and “anti-democratic procedure.” Specifically, we contend that Brudastova violated Section 4 of “UAW Ethical Practices Codes: Democratic Practices” of the [UAW election committee guide](#) and [Article 38, Section 10, of the UAW Constitution](#).

Our demands are twofold: first, that Brudastova resign from the GWC’s contract campaign. Second, that transparent, democratic procedures for Elections Committees

¹ “UAW Ethical Practices Codes: Section I., Democratic Practices,” *UAW Constitution*, 134. Available online here: <https://uaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2018-UAW-Constitution.pdf>

² Article 31, Section 1. “A charge by a member or members in good standing that a member or members have violated this Constitution or engaged in conduct unbecoming a member of the Union must be specifically set forth in writing and signed by the member or members making the charges. The charges must state the exact nature of the alleged offense or offenses and, if possible, the period of time during which the offense or offenses allegedly took place. Two (2) or more members may be jointly charged with having participated in the same act or acts charged as an offense or with having acted jointly in commission of such an offense and may be jointly tried,” *UAW Constitution*, 72. See link in footnote 1.

be written by rank-and-file members and brought to the general membership for a vote within three (3) months of this report's filing.

Signed,

Lexie Cook (rank-and-file member of GWC-UAW)

Sayantani Mukherjee (rank-and-file member of GWC-UAW)

I. Opacity Regarding the Elections Committee

Because the election was being held entirely electronically, several members had questions about the process and procedures for the Elections Committee (hereafter, EC). At meetings with members and in her email correspondence with members, Brudastova repeatedly evaded member questions, or gave vague answers which required follow-up. In many cases, she simply did not respond to members' questions at all. Several examples of this inappropriate behavior follow.

At the [Organizing Committee meeting on Tuesday, September 1st](#), members put "Elections Questions" on the agenda. During the discussion of this item, members asked who was on the Elections Committee. In response, Brudastova identified herself as a member of the EC, along with two others she did not name.³ Note that members in the unit had not voted for the EC; the process establishing the EC did not involve any unit members. It appears Brudastova was named to this position by Local 2110 President Maida Rosenstein, a standard UAW procedure.⁴ However, given Brudastova's

³ In emails that had gone out to the unit regarding the Bargaining Committee vacancy elections, "Elections Committee" was used as a sign-off. No personal names were used. Members were therefore curious as to the composition of the EC.

⁴ Article X., Section 1. of [Local 2110's bylaws](#) states that "Elections of Stewards and Bargaining Committee persons shall be conducted by a member of the Executive Board of the Local Union or its designee in accordance with the provisions of the International Constitution."

partiality and disregard for democratic processes, discussed below, we believe she should not have been nominated to the EC.

Also at the September 1st meeting, members asked Brudastova for the names of the other members of the EC. She responded that the other members were “two workers from 2110” and declined to share their names. At the same meeting, Brudastova stated that questions about the election process could go either to her personal email address or to the Local’s main email address. While members had the option of contacting Olga through the main address, Brudastova believed it acceptable to answer member questions via her personal email address, to which (presumably) only she has access. (See Figure 1.)

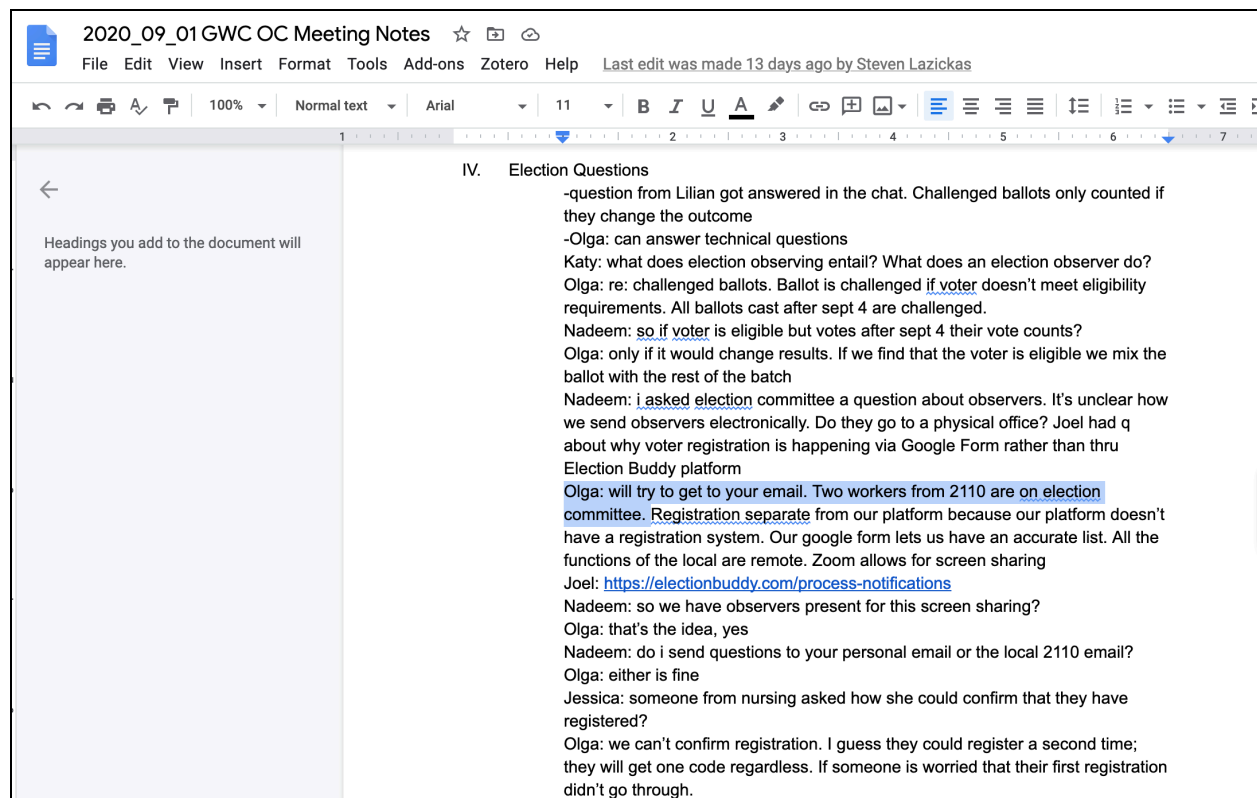


Figure 1. September 1 meeting notes.

At a later [meeting on September 8th](#), after further requests from members, Brudastova provided the other two EC members’ first names, but withheld one of the members’ last

names. She explicitly refused to share either of the other two members' contact information, citing privacy concerns. (See Figure 2.)

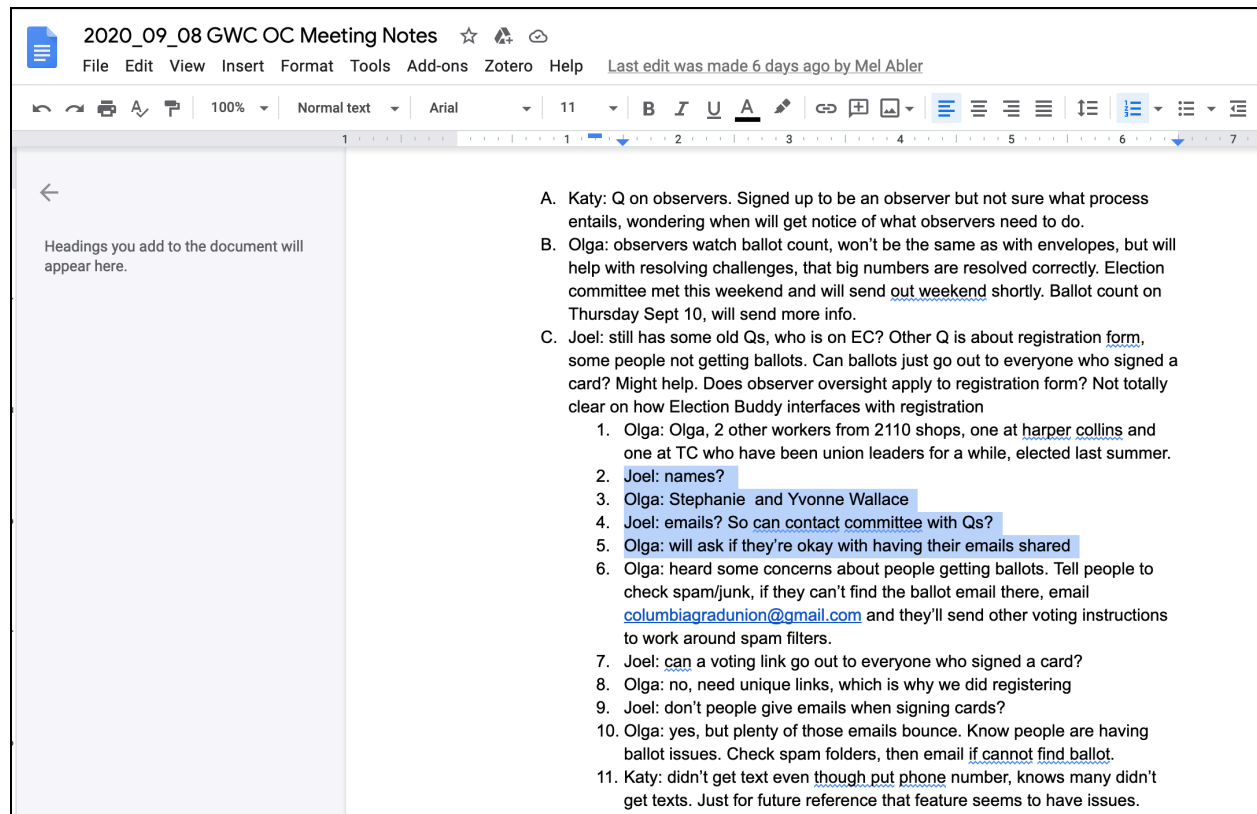


Figure 2. September 8 meeting notes.

Members also reached out to Brudastova individually seeking further information about the elections procedures. On several occasions, Brudastova simply did not respond. Such examples of Brudastova's untransparent, anti-democratic behavior are discussed in further detail in Section III., "Abrogation of Elections Observers' Rights."

A final instance of behavior unbecoming of an EC member came to light at the election observation on Thursday, September 10. At that virtual meeting, a unit member who served as an elections observer (also known as a "challenger") requested the full names of the other two EC members. The unit member contacted both of the EC members other than Brudastova, one of whom responded. That EC member (name withheld) acknowledged that neither they nor the third EC member had managed the

election process, including the pre-registration Google form (required to vote) and the sorting of ballots. They further affirmed that they had no other personal involvement except for their presence at the election observation. In other words, it appears that the two other EC members had the same status as elections observers.

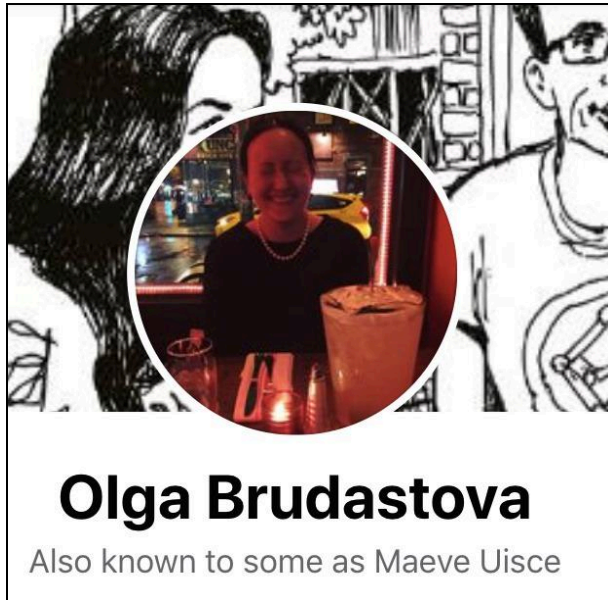
As discussed above, Local 2110's bylaws allow for a sole member to be in charge of elections. However, as early as September 1st, Brudastova acknowledged that there were two other members of the EC. Those two EC members were, however, not encouraged to participate in any elections procedures until September 10th, during the sharing of results for observers – that is, after the elections, as well as vote tabulation, had been concluded by Brudastova alone.

II. Favoritism

Brudastova's mishandling of her role on the EC, as discussed in Section I., is a problem in and of itself. Matters are further complicated by her public favoritism.

On the question of partiality, [the International UAW President's Office guide to elections](#) explains: "Throughout the election process [...] you must be fair and impartial, treating all candidates equally and avoiding any acts of favoritism or even the appearance of favoritism."

Despite this very clear prohibition on favoritism *or even the appearance of favoritism*, Brudastova publicly supported one of the two slates, the WERC slate, on Facebook. This public expression of partisanship was visible online before and during the election. (See Figures 3-4.)



Figures 3-4. Evidence of favoritism.

It is highly irregular for a UAW staffer to show favoritism during an election. Such behavior seems even more unbecoming of a staffer with sole charge over the Elections Committee overseeing the elections in which s/he has shown public favoritism. Even *outside* of elections, as the President of another UAW Local put it in correspondence with our members, such behavior is considered inimical to democratic processes enshrined in the [UAW Constitution](#) and in the [UAW election guide](#).

When Brudastova's favoritism was brought to her attention during the election observation on Thursday, September 10, Brudastova defended her actions, stating that what she does in her personal time is her own business. When members pointed out that her Facebook "like" remained visible both during her "personal time" and her

“professional time,” rendering the distinction between the two irrelevant, she thanked members for “being so interested in [her] social media.” Some point later, she unliked the WERC slate on Facebook.

III. Confusing and Unnecessary Registration Form

Voting took place on an NLRB-approved platform (Election Buddy) which offers a “registration” option through the platform itself. However, Brudastova (seemingly unilaterally) implemented and managed a separate registration Google form as a prerequisite for voting. The need for this form was never clearly explained, as ballots with voter eligibility requirements could potentially have been sent to all card-holding members of the unit. In effect, this pre-registration form, proprietarily-held, created a level of opacity in the process of voting and tabulation of votes. In response to member questions about the registration form, Brudastova again (as she had done with regard to the EC) did not provide convincing or full answers.

At the Organizing Committee meeting on Tuesday, September 1st, for instance, members asked why the separate Google form was necessary for voting (see Figure 5). Brudastova replied that “Registration [is] separate from our platform because our platform doesn’t have a registration system,” a claim which is false (as registration through Election Buddy is possible). Brudastova continued: “Our Google form lets us have an accurate list.” Brudastova did not explain what was meant by “accurate list,” nor did she explain why a separate form was necessary to ensure accuracy.

During the election observation on September 10th, observers asked about how ballots had been determined to be valid or not. They discovered that Brudastova was the only member of the EC charged with vetting ballots to determine their eligibility. No detailed description of how this process worked was provided to the other two members of the

EC, or to unit members, either before, during, or after the elections.

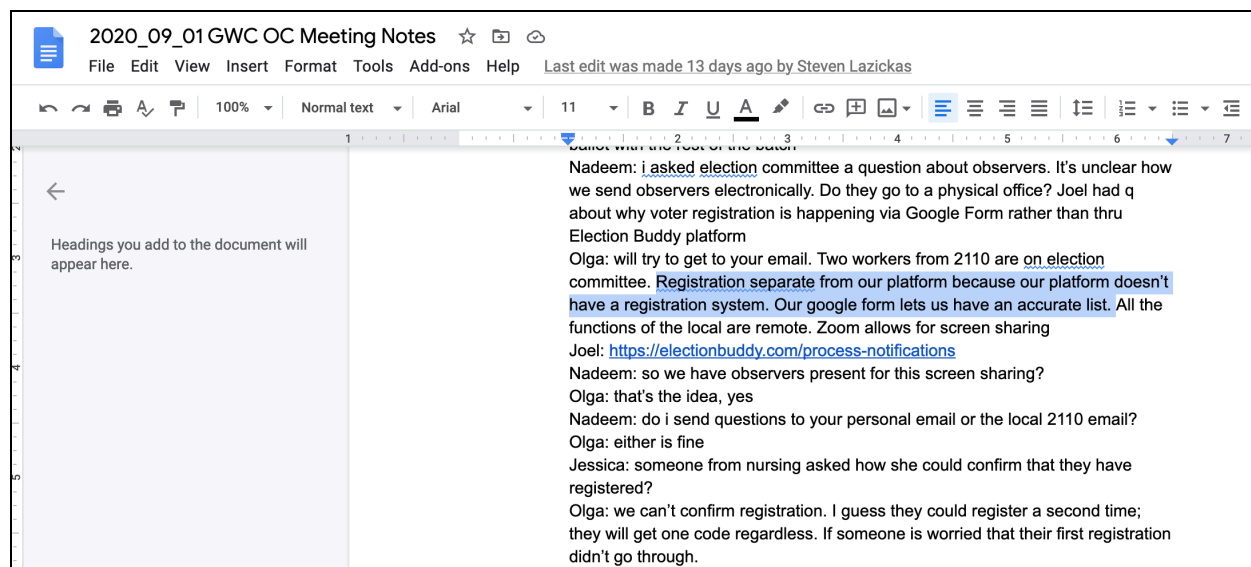


Figure 5. Discussion of registration form.

Beyond the question of the necessity of the registration form, there were a few notable problems with the form itself.

First, the form was opaque and confusing (see Figure 6). There was a lag time between when the registration form closed and when the voting opened, and the form did not clarify whether registering late via the form would affect the integrity of the ballots cast during the actual election. Late registrations (that is, when voters filled out the form *after* the registration period had technically ended) were in some cases decisive for election results. The lag time between the closing of the registration form and the opening of voting corresponded to a coordinated smear campaign across multiple departments against candidates of the non-WERC slate. When asked about these problems during the election observation, Brudastova either refused to answer questions or offered vague responses. Second, the form did not send confirmation emails to those who used it. This lack of confirmation worried voters who had poor internet connections. Many worried that their registration had not gone through before the registration deadline, but it was impossible for them to check. When Brudastova was asked to have the Google

form send confirmation of submissions to those who filled it out (a simple setting change in Google forms), she said “no.” At the Organizing Committee meeting, Brudastova told members to fill out the form again if they had a doubt about their registration.

Eligible voters have signed a GWC-UAW authorization card
If you have not signed a card (in-person or online previously) and would like to sign one you may do so here: <https://columbiagradunion.org/signup/>
If you fill out the above electronic card please mark yes to the question below.
If you do not fit the above eligibility criteria and would still like to vote, you may vote challenged.

Have you filled out a GWC-UAW authorization card? *

☒ Yes
☐ No, but I still want to vote

Eligible voters student worker status
Eligible voters have signed a GWC-UAW authorization card who are Columbia graduate and undergraduate students who are currently employed by the University, have been employed by the University in the past, or whose program includes a degree requirement to be employed by the University in one of the categories outlined by the NLRB decision (i.e. graduate and undergraduate Teaching Assistants, Teaching Fellows, Preceptors, Course Assistants, Readers, Graders, Graduate Research Assistants [including those on Training Grants], and All Departmental Research Assistants).
If you do not fit the above eligibility criteria and would still like to vote, you may vote challenged.

Do you fit the above eligibility for student worker status? *

☒ Yes
☐ No, but I still want to vote

Figure 6. Voter registration form.

IV. Abrogation of Elections Observers' Rights

Several problems arose in regard to elections observers, also known as challengers.

Before the elections observation took place on September 10th, Brudastova ignored and did not reply to several emails inquiring about the role of challengers (a role

outlined in the UAW Constitution). Examples of Brudastova's disregard for members' questions about the role of challengers are provided below (also disregard of emails.).

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Joanna Lee** <lee.joannasw@gmail.com>
Date: Fri, 4 Sep 2020 at 12:18 PM
Subject: Re: Acceptance of nomination (GWC-UAW Local 2110 Bargaining Committee vacancy elections)
To: <local2110@2110uaw.org>
Cc: Olga Brudastova <obrudastova@gmail.com>, Yasemin Akcaguner <yaseminakcaguner@gmail.com>

Dear UAW Local 2110 Elections Committee,

I am writing to have Yasemin Akcaguner, CC-ed in this email, to be my observer for the bargaining committee elections.

Regards,

Joanna Lee
TEL (SG): +65 9059 3707 | EMAIL: lee.joannasw@gmail.com
 profile

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Joanna Lee** <lee.joannasw@gmail.com>
Date: Wed, 9 Sep 2020 at 12:59 PM
Subject: Election observing
To: Olga Brudastova <obrudastova@gmail.com>, <local2110@2110uaw.org>, <olgabrudastova@2110uaw.org>
Cc: Yasemin Akcaguner <yaseminakcaguner@gmail.com>

Hi Olga,

I would like Yasemin to be an observer for elections. How does this work?

Regards,

Joanna Lee
TEL (SG): +65 9059 3707 | EMAIL: lee.joannasw@gmail.com
 profile

Furthermore, challengers were not present (either physically or remotely) during times when, according to the Constitution, they should be present. According to Article 38, Section 10:

“Each candidate shall have the right to have one (1) challenger present when the votes are cast and when they are tabulated, provided that such a challenger shall be a member of the Local Union.”⁵

Election Buddy's [Vote Audit](#) indicates that votes were cast *before* challengers were even informed that they had been accepted as observers/challengers. See attached

⁵ UAW Constitution, 107. Available online here:
<https://uaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2018-UAW-Constitution.pdf>

screenshot for an example of a vote being cast and a vote being spoiled on September 8th, when no observer/challenger was present.

b9071d7541c4055	2020-09-08 11:22:40	162.83.180.140	Key Surfaced
5e588eb6b327761	2020-09-08 09:05:28	160.39.57.140	Ballot Spoiled

Voting occurring without observers/challengers present

Observers and challengers were not present while votes were cast or tabulated – a direct contravention of the UAW Constitution. On September 9th, the closing day of the election, the EC finally sent a message to challengers, copied below.

Dear candidates and designated challengers,

We hope this finds you well. We are writing to let you know that the GWC bargaining committee vacancy election ballot count will be **tomorrow, Thursday, September 10, at 2 PM EST** via Zoom (information below).

Please review the description of the challenger role [here](#).

Best regards,

Local 2110 Election Committee:

Olga, Stephanie, Yvonne

On September 10th, challengers were briefly allowed to share Brudastova's screen. This allowed them simply to glimpse results that had already been accepted, sorted, and tabulated by Brudastova alone. Challengers' rights to be "present when the votes are cast and when they are tabulated" were not upheld.

Second, challengers were not allowed to observe the counting closely enough to verify the accuracy of the tally. In mail ballot elections, challengers "must also be allowed to accompany Election Committee members when the returned ballots are [...] reviewed for eligibility, and counted."

(<http://uaw2322.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Guide-for-Local-Union-Elections-Committee-sm.pdf> footnote on pg. 57) Challengers were given no opportunity to review

ballots for eligibility. Challengers were never informed in advance about what they would be allowed to do, and not do, at the polls and the ballot tally. In effect, observers were only present at the announcement of results, and asked only to briefly review a list of names of individuals who had cast votes. Observers were expected to point out discrepancies on this list based on an assumption of who they knew to be workers eligible to vote. Challengers were given no other opportunities to review ballots for eligibility, nor did they have access to a list of unit members eligible to vote.

V. Demand

Due to Brudastova's demonstrated partiality, as well as her access to and management of registration and voting without observers and challengers, a series of sinister possibilities for what occurred present themselves. While it might be possible to recount and resort ballots, it is unfortunately impossible to quantify what the outcome of an impartial, fairly-run election would have been.

Why did Brudastova openly display unbecoming behavior during this election? How was the Google form for pre-registration used? When and how were votes tabulated by Brudastova (since certainly challengers were not included)? What times were election results accessed? These questions should be answered. They should have answers already. Unfortunately, they stand unaddressed, serving a damaging and unmitigated blow to fairness and trust in the union.

We ask that Brudastova resign from the GWC's contract campaign on the basis of our findings demonstrating: (1) Brudastova's unbecoming conduct and partiality; (2) Brudastova's access to and management of registration and voting without observers and challengers.

Second, we ask that democratic procedures for Elections Committees be written by rank-and-file members and brought to the general membership for a vote within three

(3) months of this report's filing. Going forward, greater transparency and clarity is required with regard to election procedures, and the GWC's rank and file members must be included in the process in order to uphold the appearance of fairness and trust in the union.