

Workers support campaign by Will Lehman for UAW president: “All it takes is a spark”

Marcus Day
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For more information on Will Lehman’s campaign, visit WillForUAWPresident.org.

The announcement by Will Lehman that he is running for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) this year has been met with strong interest and enthusiasm by autoworkers and other sections of workers.

Lehman, 34, works at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, the site of a nearly two-week long strike in 2019, which coincided with the General Motors strike that year.

In his video statement announcing the campaign, Lehman said he is fighting to develop a movement of rank-and-file workers in the US and in other countries. Outlining his platform, he said he is demanding:

1. Not the reform of the existing bureaucracy, but its abolition.
2. An end to all UAW-corporate bodies.
3. Full, rank-and-file control and oversight.
4. A program and plan for workers to fight for what we need, not for what the corporations claim is acceptable. This includes massive wage increases to make up for decades of declining real wages, the restoration of COLA to match wages to soaring inflation, the abolition of all tiers and full health care and pensions for current workers and retirees.

Lehman told the WSWS that workers at Mack began to approach him about his campaign the day after he announced it. “One coworker in particular was very excited about it. He told me, ‘I woke up in the morning and the video was the first thing I saw. I was half asleep so I watched it again and it got better. Then I watched it again and it got even better. It definitely brightened my day. You made it perfectly clear, your direction.’

“The coworker said, ‘Believe it or not Bill, you got a lot of people’s eyes open real wide right now, because all it

takes is that spark.’”

Other Mack workers also spoke favorably about the campaign. “Got my vote,” one commented on Facebook. Another told the WSWS, responding to Lehman’s platform, “A lot of workers at Mack Trucks don’t care for the UAW. It’s never done much for us. The strike we had was a joke. There are a lot of problems with our pay. I get a 1 percent wage increase every year, with inflation like it is now! We can’t even retire with benefits. We can’t make a career out of this. Increase our COLA, bring back pensions.”

A number of auto parts workers—who have seen their wages and workplaces driven to extreme sweatshop conditions by the corporations and the UAW—also stated their support for the campaign. A worker at Dana Inc., a global maker of axles, driveshafts and other components, said she thought it would be good to see someone “that wants to get rid of the tier system and wants genuine change for the workers.” She said she agreed with “his take on workers taking back the control,” adding, “it’s what we all need.” In 2021, workers at Dana voted down a UAW- and United Steelworkers-backed tentative agreement which maintained poverty wages, rejecting it by 90 percent.

A Ventra auto parts worker in Evart, Michigan told the WSWS, “I support Will Lehman for UAW president. His ideals are good and they are attainable with a fight. My father and my grandfather worked for General Motors. Will stands for workers everywhere.”

On Monday, workers at Ventra rebelled against the attempt by the UAW to force through a tentative agreement with below-inflation raises and higher health costs, voting down the deal almost unanimously, by 95 percent.

The Ventra worker was particularly enthusiastic about the internationalism at the center of Will Lehman’s campaign. “I make parts for the Big Three. I work with parts from China and from Mexico. We workers are all one body! You can’t say the left leg is more important than the right, or we will never be able to walk.

“I remember being in middle school. I had a teacher that told us we would one day be an equal part in a world economy, and I couldn’t have disagreed more. I lived a pretty comfortable childhood in the home of two autoworkers.

“But things have changed for the worse. We’ve lost ground. People don’t realize that for the wealthy we are expendable—just consumers and labor making them richer.

“But we have the numbers, and we can control the distribution of wealth if we assert ourselves and believe in ourselves! We need to get behind Will Lehman and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.”

Randall, an auto parts worker from UAW Local 892 at Faurecia in Saline, Michigan, said he endorsed the campaign of Will Lehman for UAW president. “First of all, he’s a socialist,” he said. “Everything he says is true.

“We need rank-and-file committees in every plant across the country and around the world. This campaign is a good way to get this movement going.

“We have got to get rid of the policy of nationalism, and the bureaucrats that represent it. Because that plays right into the hands of the warmongers who are taking us into World War III.

“It takes leaders like Will to stand up to that and build a movement against it. He’s putting forward a policy for workers all over the world. Basically workers need to get control of the world and get these bureaucrats out of there.

“COVID-19 is still out there and spreading, and too many auto workers have been infected and too many have died unnecessarily. My brother was mandated to work at MMI in the Saline Business Park off Michigan Avenue where there are a half a dozen parts plants, including Jack Products, which manufactures roof racks for all makes and models.

“None of them shut down and the virus spread like wildfire. My brother died a horrible death last November from COVID because of that policy. He was compelled to work because he was caring for our grandmother, who also caught it from him.

“That’s another reason I’m all out for Will’s campaign, because he has the only policy to stop it. That is Zero COVID like they did in China. That is full testing, contact tracing, full medical care, shutdowns to stop outbreaks. That is what we should have done. My brother would be alive

today.

“Many workers have the wrong message about socialism, but Will explains it loud and clear. Socialism is not for dictatorship over the workers. That was Stalinism and it led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. We stand for equality of all workers and for the betterment of workers.”

Beyond the auto industry, workers in other sectors voiced their support for the campaign. A worker from the University of Michigan Medical Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan said, “Fantastic! Will’s campaign will pull everything together. I’m all for it.

“He stands for full rank-and-file control in the plants. And that goes for the hospitals and the schools and every work place. This is a campaign which is showing some leadership. That is something we really need because a lot of people don’t realize the severity of the situation facing the employees. At my job we have people working full time who still can’t make it.

“They need to know that they are not alone and there is a movement within the working class that is willing to fight. So many people are underpaid.

“Will tells the truth. The UAW bureaucracy is full of lies and they will try to isolate workers and wear them down when they go out on strike. We have to stand together to fight that. I’m calling for full support to Will’s campaign.

“I want to see a change. There has to be safety in the factories and all over the world.”

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