

Support Will Lehman's campaign for UAW president!

WSWS Editorial Board
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The *World Socialist Web Site* endorses the campaign by Will Lehman for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and urges the broadest possible support for it among workers in the US and internationally. Lehman, a socialist and 34-year-old worker at the Mack Trucks assembly plant in Macungie, Pennsylvania, launched his campaign with a video statement last week.

The aim of his campaign, Lehman lays out in his video, is to develop a rank-and-file rebellion of workers against the bureaucratic apparatus of the UAW as part of a counter-offensive of workers throughout the US and internationally.

"My campaign is different from every other," Lehman states, "because I insist that replacing one bureaucrat with another will not change anything about the character of the bureaucracy at the 'international' or local level of the UAW. Change will only take place to the extent that we organize our independent strength, through the formation of rank-and-file committees composed of and controlled by workers, not bureaucrats."

To demolish the massive UAW bureaucracy and break its stranglehold over workers, Lehman's platform advances a series of demands. These include:

- The elimination of the positions and bloated salaries of executives and other officers who make six figures to do nothing more than sell workers out;
- An end to the UAW-Big Three "joint training" programs, which have been the conduit of billions of dollars of corporate funding to the UAW;
- Workers' control and oversight over all contract negotiations, vote-counting and safety;
- The elaboration of a program based on what workers actually need, including major wage increases, the abolition of all tiers, COLA raises to protect against inflation and health care and pensions for both active workers and retirees.

Lehman's campaign is taking place under conditions of an extraordinary and intensifying crisis, which finds its most concentrated expression in the United States. Capitalism—that is, a social and economic system that subordinates everything to the profit interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy—is demonstrating its bankruptcy at every point.

The US is characterized by staggering levels of social inequality, which have increased enormously during the two

and a half years of the pandemic. The country is falling apart. Production, transportation and social infrastructure are in a state of chaos, plagued by chronic understaffing. The ruling class is responding with an effort to enormously intensify exploitation, leading to a growth in job injuries and deaths on the shop floor.

There are the daily, horrific mass shootings, like that which took place in Highland Park, Illinois, on Monday; the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed more than 1 million in the US and continues to infect more than 100,000 a day; the rapidly escalating US-NATO proxy war against Russia in the Ukraine, which threatens to spiral into nuclear conflict; as well as the increasing attacks on democratic rights and the threat of fascist dictatorship.

The same conditions prevail in every major capitalist country. Workers, however, are beginning to fight back. Major strikes and other struggles by workers around the world are gathering pace, fueled by soaring food and gas prices.

Last month, tens of thousands of rail workers in the United Kingdom walked out in the first national rail strike in a generation. Strikes or strike votes have quickly spread throughout the international airline industry in recent weeks.

In Sri Lanka, the island nation off the coast of India, mass demonstrations first erupted in March over shortages of food and fuel and runaway inflation, followed by a series of one-day general strikes. Last week, health care workers on the island struck, denouncing the government for deliberately starving them of fuel and transport to work, threatening the national health service with collapse.

Strikes by teachers and educators have swept one country after another, from Brazil to Uganda, Australia to China, driven by anger over both falling real pay and cuts to school budgets. And in the global auto and heavy equipment industries, militant struggles are emerging. In South Korea, a strike is looming by more than 40,000 autoworkers at global automaker Hyundai, seeking major improvements to pay, benefits and retirement.

In the US, the response of the Biden administration and the Democratic Party has been to attempt to strengthen the trade union apparatus, integrating it ever more directly into the structures of management and the state. When Biden calls himself the "most pro-union president in history," it is because his administration sees the union apparatus and its privileged

executives as crucial for disciplining workers to accept austerity and war.

However, as the WSWs has long anticipated, the renewed eruption of the global class struggle is taking the form of a rebellion against the trade union bureaucracies, which have spent the past four decades driving down workers' living standards on behalf of the ruling class.

Workers' rebellion against the pro-corporate unions have found initial expression in the overwhelming rejection of union-backed contracts over the past year. Workers overwhelmingly voted down at least eight contracts endorsed by the UAW alone, beginning with Volvo Trucks workers' rejection of a pro-company contract by 91 percent in May 2021.

Most recently, hundreds of workers at Ventra Evart, an auto parts factory in rural Michigan, voted by a stunning 95 percent against a deal unanimously endorsed by the UAW's bargaining team, after UAW International Representative for Region 1-D Dan Kosheba told workers they did not deserve and would not achieve higher wages because they are "not the Big Three [automakers]."

In several struggles over the past year, workers have taken the first steps towards organizing themselves independently. At Volvo, parts maker Dana Inc., farm equipment giant John Deere, and now Ventra, workers formed rank-and-file factory committees to articulate and fight for their needs, unify their struggles and overcome the isolation and information blackout imposed by union executives.

The election of the UAW's president and executive board this year is itself only taking place because of state intervention into a crisis that has wracked the union since 2017, when a far-reaching corruption scandal first publicly emerged. The revelations of the federal investigation confirmed what workers had already long suspected: The UAW is controlled by swindlers and gangsters in the pay of the corporations.

The UAW, however, is but a particularly glaring expression of a universal process. Basing themselves on a reactionary nationalist program, the unions responded to the globalization of production in the late 1970s by transforming themselves into tools of the corporate and financial oligarchy. The ever-closer integration of the unions with the corporations and the state has coincided with a massive increase in the wealth and privileges of the union apparatus, which has developed material interests—such as substantial stock holdings—which place it at odds with the interests of workers.

Significantly, Lehman has placed an international orientation at the center of his campaign, stating in his video, "We must fight with all workers' interests in mind as our struggles are connected by the global nature of production." Lehman said his campaign identifies with and supports the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The IWA-RFC was launched just over a year ago by the *World Socialist Web Site* and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties to provide the organizational framework for workers to coordinate

and unify their struggles globally against the transnational corporations.

The campaign is aimed at breaking the stranglehold of the apparatus over workers. In this, it is in line with a long tradition within the Trotskyist movement. Trotsky wrote in "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay," an essay published posthumously in 1941 after his assassination by a Stalinist agent in August 1940, that it is necessary "to mobilize the masses, not only against the bourgeoisie, but against the totalitarian regime within the trade unions themselves and the leaders enforcing this regime."

The ultimate aim of such a rebellion, however, is the establishment of workers' control of production and the reorganization of society on the basis of human need, not private profit. Lehman explained in his statement that he is running as a socialist. "Workers have a lot of mistaken ideas about socialism," he said. "This is because there have been so many lies about what it is. Socialism means a society based on the principle of equality, where production is controlled democratically by the workers, not by an elite layer of multi-billionaires and shareholders."

The campaign by Will Lehman for UAW president deserves and requires the active and energetic support from all workers—first and foremost, auto parts and autoworkers; Mack and Volvo Trucks workers; John Deere, Caterpillar and striking CNH workers; grad student workers; temps, full-time workers and retirees; and other workers in the UAW.

While focused on the auto industry, the campaign serves as a model for workers in every industry. The WSWs urges all workers to support it as part of the fight for the development of rank-and-file committees in their factories, warehouses and workplaces.

It is to be expected that the UAW bureaucracy will do everything possible to block Lehman's candidacy. Its success, however, depends on the degree to which it becomes a focal point for the development of a broad-based and interconnected movement of workers across different industries and throughout different countries, advancing the fight to unify the international working class around its common class interests.

To that end, the WSWs calls for the widest possible support for Will Lehman's campaign among its readers and workers around the world.

For more information on the campaign of Will Lehman, visit WillForUAWPresident.org.



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