

Leader of 2021 Volvo Trucks fight backs Will Lehman's campaign for UAW president

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

Workers throughout the US and internationally are issuing statements of support for Will Lehman, a 34-year-old Mack Trucks worker who is running for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union. Lehman is a socialist who is calling for the formation of rank-and-file committees to mobilize autoworkers to abolish the UAW bureaucracy and fight for massive wage increases, a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to meet soaring inflation, the abolition of all tiers, and full health care and pensions for workers and retirees.

Rick is a Volvo Trucks worker and a leader of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The committee led the fight against the company and the UAW bureaucracy during the 2021 strike by 3,000 manufacturing workers at the New River Valley (NRV) plant in Dublin, Virginia.

“Will’s campaign is good,” Rick said. “Hopefully, it will bring about the changes that he is talking about. We need to get rid of the corruption in the UAW. It is exciting that he is bringing to the forefront the need to build rank-and-file committees everywhere. These committees are exactly what workers need to speak up and voice their concerns. Our corrupt local union officials and their cronies did nothing for us. Without a rank-and-file committee workers get drowned out, and we are just a paycheck for the UAW International. With a committee you can stand up and be heard.

“That was our experience at Volvo Trucks during last year’s strike. Our committee put the word out, and it was different from the information workers got from the local and the International. It proved to each worker that they weren’t the only ones who felt something was amiss with the UAW leaders. It was not right that they wanted us to accept a bad contract. The facts we

released, with the help of the WSWS, gave workers information they needed to fight for something better. The committee gave workers a backbone and something to stand up for.

“The UAW officials like to keep workers in the blind and not knowing anything. The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee sounded the horn and changed the course of the strike. Workers said, ‘There is more out there, and we don’t have to take what they give.’”

During three-month battle, Rick said, he got to know Will Lehman, who was fighting to win support for the striking workers at his own plant, the Mack Trucks factory in Macungie, Pennsylvania. Will and other workers at the Volvo-owned Mack plant in Pennsylvania opposed efforts by management and the UAW to force them to handle scab parts from the strike-bound plant in Virginia. They would go on to found the Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

“I talked to Will. He seems outstanding and is genuine in his beliefs about making changes. I don’t want to see the UAW just go by the wayside. But it’s all the unions. You hear it on Facebook and from other workers, people are tired of union corruption, but they know they can’t just walk away. They know you need to have an organization and a voice to fight the giant corporations like Amazon, who have more money and are more powerful.

“But the rank and file has to take over. During our strike, they gave us piddly strike benefits. The top UAW executives are always too busy collecting their fat paychecks off the working people.

“At the new building Volvo Trucks built at NRV, the company invited the union officials to unionize the workers, but they unanimously told them to take a hike. The union put out a statement that management intimidated the workers, and that they were too scared

to vote for the UAW. But that's the farthest from the truth. The company invited the UAW organizers into the lobby and all but campaigned for them. But workers with 20 years plus experience know who they are.

"After we learned about rank-and-file committees, we stick together more, just us workers. Management tried to switch us to a new schedule, and we stopped them. We said, 'We are the ones who will decide on our workweek and how many hours we're going to work.' We all stuck together, and we got the extra day off. We know we can't have the attitude, 'I'm all for myself,' and it has brought us closer together."

Rick spoke about Will Lehman's call for the international unity of workers to fight the global auto companies and corporations like French-Italian-American conglomerate Stellantis (formerly Fiat Chrysler) and Swedish-based Volvo. "Internationalism is a good idea. It gives workers the opportunity to hear the trials and tribulations of workers in other countries, and to bring our heads together to fight back against these big corporations.

"We wouldn't have heard about the Belgian Volvo workers if it wasn't for the WSWS and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. The UAW didn't tell us anything about the Belgian workers. They went on a wildcat strike after a WSWS campaign team showed up at their plant to inform them about our strike.

"Through international coordination we can show sympathy and unite with workers around the world.

"If we win the support of workers in China, Mexico and other countries, if the corporations try to take our jobs there and pay them half the wages or less, the workers can say, 'Hell no. We will not do the work of our American brothers for miserable pay.' They will fight for improved wages, and that will help all of us.

"When I first joined the UAW back in the 1990s, if somebody was out on strike or even if they were about to go on strike, the leadership told us about it. We would go out to join striking workers on the picket lines at Freightliner, Peterbilt and other places. They don't do that anymore. That's because the UAW leaders signed shady deals for the workers at these other places they represent, and they don't want other workers to hear about it. So, they keep us in the dark. Workers can only learn about these struggles and join them through the WSWS and the rank-and-file

committees."

Addressing himself to the rising tide of working-class opposition after last year's Volvo strike, Rick said, "Pilots are striking, and workers are getting killed at the pump and grocery store. So many people died of COVID, and so many small businesses were ruined. The big corporations got billions in COVID relief and now the government is spending billions on a war that nobody wants. After drinking from the government well, these corporations are trying to screw the workers even more.

"I will be throwing my support to Will Lehman's campaign and telling workers at Volvo Trucks to support this fight."

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