

Detroit Stellantis (Chrysler) workers back Will Lehman's campaign for UAW presidency

Jerry White
8 July 2022

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). Lehman is a socialist who is fighting not to reform but to abolish the UAW bureaucracy. He is calling for the formation of rank-and-file committees to mobilize autoworkers to 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.

Tyrone is a young worker at the Stellantis Warren Truck plant in suburban Detroit. He said, "I am all for Will Lehman's campaign. It is refreshing to hear something that is different. A lot of workers are skeptical because we've seen so many people go through the union, solid people, who got turned. But Will is saying we have to throw out the whole bureaucracy, and that's what it will take."

"I like his message, that he's a socialist, but that you don't have to be a socialist to support his campaign. If you are tired of being sold out, split into tiers, forced to accept one concessions contract after the next, Will said, you should join and build this movement. Hopefully, people will listen, and I will do everything I can to spread the word."

"Workers are sick and tired. The last contracts with Fiat Chrysler, GM and Ford were negotiated in bad faith by union leaders who were jailed for embezzlement and taking bribes. We workers believe these contracts should be nullified. If we had a real union, they would be renegotiated, and we would get everything back they took from us. But the UAW leaders wouldn't do that, and that shows they were for

these rotten deals.

"I fully support the rank-and-file committees that Will is fighting for. They have always been the only way for workers to express our true voice and to unify. If teachers are on strike, we need to unify with them. If fast food workers are fighting, we need to be supporting them. Globally, all workers have to be on the same accord."

"For me socialism is not a dirty word. I studied socialism and learned that it was not the same as Stalinism. All the founders of the UAW in the 1930s were socialists, like Will said. Socialism favors the common people, and the only people who benefit from the fight against socialism are the rich and the higher ups. That's because socialism will leave capitalism on the wayside."

Addressing himself to the issues that Will raises in his program, Tyrone said, "We definitely need COLA [Cost of Living Adjustment] brought back. Inflation is killing us. A lot of TPTs [Temporary part-time employees] have gotten rolled over to full-time, but there are so many more. They are treated three times worse than when I was a TPT. Twelve-hour shifts are mandatory for them, but optional for full-timers. That abuse has to stop."

"We also need clear transparent language in the contract. To read the current contracts you have to be a scholar and have a lawyer at your shoulder. That's not cool. They do that intentionally. I want to go to the book to see what my rights are without having to look up the words in a dictionary."

"For instance, they have this 'launching curve' for new product releases. Management does what they see fit and completely ignores the contract. They impose mandatory overtime and indefinite shifts. If you ask your UAW committeeman about it, they say

management can do it. The committeemen sound like supervisors.

“I was working at SHAP [Sterling Heights Assembly Plant] when workers walked out to protect themselves from COVID. I agree with the family of Catherine Pace who said that Stellantis and the UAW should be held accountable for all the COVID deaths in the plants. They made us come into the plants, when we weren’t essential, and they never even paid us hazard pay. I caught COVID in the plant in November 2021, right at the time of the Omicron surge. I wanted to inform everyone I came in contact with, but the company didn’t want me to. I got on Facebook and warned them anyway.

“Everything is going to hell, with the pandemic, high prices, the mass shootings, the danger of world war. They pulled this mass killer in Illinois over and peacefully arrested him. When it came to Jayland Walker in Akron, they shot him 60 times and killed him like an animal. I’m learning about labor history and socialism because workers are going to have to fight like our forefathers did.”

Kathy, a young worker with only a few years at Warren Truck, said, “What Will says sound positive, and it is the stuff we need. We must fight for COLA because Chrysler hasn’t given us a real raise in years. New workers are making what my dad did when he hired in at Chrysler in the early 1990s. Back then you were rolled over to full time immediately after you finished your 90-day probationary period.

“The companies are steadily hiring part-time workers and paying them less for years. You can make more at McDonald’s than I do in an auto plant. This is supposed to be a career job. I debate everyday whether to have meat with dinner. Inflation is eating up our paychecks for food, for gas, for everything.

“I was only one of handful who hired in with me that got rolled over to full time. The others got ‘retraction emails’ saying, ‘We’re pushing your rollover date to June,’ then they got another one pushing the date to July. Then they get told, ‘We’ll let you know.’

“When you are first hired and come in for your orientation, the union reps say, ‘Management is the problem, don’t do anything before talking to your UAW representative.’ Then, when the company is short-handed, they make you do the job of two workers. You try to find a UAW rep and they’re never around.

You end up fighting for yourself. I’m paying these dudes and half the time they are not even in the plant, and they never answer your calls or texts.

“If they do come down to your work location, they say, ‘There is nothing I can do. Management can do that because we are in launch mode.’ When you point out that according to the calendar, it is not launch period yet, they say, ‘We’re about to get into launch mode.’

“We had a machine break down and management and the union came down and told us we had to load the dashboards into the cars by hand. They are heavy and sharp, and they told us to do it without protective sleeves. The union reps were standing with the supervisors. They put a few dashboards in and told us, ‘This isn’t so bad.’ They were even singing work songs. Then they made us do a 10-hour mandatory workday and it was hot as hell.

“We’ve seen guys have seizures or pass out on the line. The managers and the union reps just pull the guy off the line and get the assembly line going again. I really feel for the family of Catherine Pace who died from COVID after getting it at the paint shop. Chrysler should be held accountable.

“The union doesn’t tell us anything. Now we are learning about indefinite layoffs at Sterling Stamping and rumors about the elimination of a shift at Jefferson North. It’s very scary.

“The billionaires are making more money than ever, and the poor people are getting poorer. People are losing their homes, and many have lost their lives during the pandemic.

“I agree with Will, workers should all be united in the US and across the world. We’re not the only ones who have to support our families. GM and other companies take their factories all over the world for cheaper labor. We have to defend our jobs here and unite with workers in other countries to defend all our jobs and livelihoods.”

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



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact