

Letter to UAW delegates from Will Lehman: “The UAW has become a union in name only”

WSWS Autoworkers Newsletter

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The WSWS is publishing below the text of a letter sent by Will Lehman to delegates attending the UAW Constitutional Convention, which begins on Monday, July 25. Lehman is a 34-year-old Mack Trucks worker running for UAW president.

The letter was sent via an email list maintained by the court-appointed Monitor overseeing the elections.

The WSWS has endorsed the campaign of Lehman for UAW president. To find out more about Lehman’s campaign, visit WillforUAWpresident.org.

To all delegates at the UAW Convention,

My name is Will Lehman, and I am running for president of the UAW International.

I have been recognized as a bona fide candidate by the court-appointed Monitor. In order to be placed on the ballot for the elections in October-November, I must still be nominated at the convention this coming week. This requires the support of at least one delegate to put forward my name during the nomination session.

As the UAW Constitutional Convention begins on Monday, the conditions of life for UAW workers and retirees are intolerable.

Decades of concessions contracts agreed to by the UAW have created a situation where a large section of members are impoverished. In many cases, workers had contracts with 2 or 3 percent annual wage increases imposed upon them by UAW executives who were well aware of soaring inflation. Now, the soaring cost of goods means workers are seeing real wage cuts of between 5 and 10 percent a year. The 8-hour day is a thing of the past, replaced with grueling “alternative” work schedules and mandatory overtime.

Now, as the economic situation deteriorates, the companies are beginning to implement mass layoffs, including at Stellantis and Ford. How will the UAW

bureaucracy respond? To ask is to answer. It will accept these layoffs just as it has accepted the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs over the past four decades.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed the lives of thousands of workers and more than one million people in the US over the past year, is again raging through the plants and workplaces, with the UAW doing nothing to safeguard our health and lives. Workers are collapsing on the line amidst record heat as they work forced overtime and weekends to ramp up production for the companies.

In this campaign, I am advancing a program of struggle. It is high time that workers throughout the UAW, in unity with all sections of the working class, launch a coordinated fight to demand and win what we need, including, as a beginning: Massive pay increases, mandatory COLA to match inflation, an end to all tiers and permanent TPTs, full funding of pensions and high-quality health care for workers and retirees, and the re-establishment of the 8-hour day.

In carrying forward such a program, however, it is necessary to clearly acknowledge how we got to this point. The entire policy of the UAW over decades has destroyed everything that previous generations of workers have won through bitter struggle.

The UAW has become a union in name only. It is a corporate-controlled organization managed by a massive apparatus that has become an instrument of management. The main concern of this apparatus is to increase its wealth and privileges, not advance the interests of UAW members.

This convention is being held to approve direct elections to the leadership because of the massive corruption scandal that has exposed the criminality of the UAW apparatus.

The last convention, held in 2018, was overseen by individuals who have since been hauled off to jail. This included then outgoing president Dennis Williams and the president elected at the convention, Gary Jones. Only two years later, Jones pleaded guilty to embezzlement and conspiracy charges for his role in stealing more than \$1.5 million in union funds. So enthusiastic were the delegates for these crooks that the convention even approved a massive pay raise for the apparatus.

Every year, Solidarity House distributes \$75 million in income to hundreds of assistants, servicing reps, secretaries, and other officials who make between \$100,000 and \$160,000 annually. And to do what? Enforce contracts that workers don't want and suppress our efforts to fight back.

It is now routine that contracts "negotiated" by the UAW behind our backs are rejected by more than 90%, as has happened over the past year at Volvo Trucks, Dana, Deere and, most recently, Tenneco and Ventra. And yet somehow, with whatever minor changes, the contracts are pushed through. HarperCollins workers just voted to strike by 99.5%, but the UAW only called them out for a day before sending them back to work.

I am running for president of the UAW International to spearhead a mass movement of the rank-and-file to break the domination of the apparatus and to transfer power and control over all decision-making processes to workers in the auto plants and all work locations. If the UAW is to exist, it has to be an organization of the workers, by the workers and for the workers.

The outcome of the nomination process will determine whether there are any delegates who represent and will speak for the rank-and-file. If you are prepared to fight, stand up to the apparatus, and ensure that workers have a real choice in these elections, now is the time to step forward.

Sincerely,



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