

Will Lehman is nominated to run for UAW president

Jerry White
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The WSWS has endorsed the campaign of Will Lehman for UAW president. For more information go to WillforUAWpresident.org.

Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and a socialist, has been nominated to run for president of the United Auto Workers union in the election being held in October and November.

Lehman was nominated by two delegates from the floor of the UAW 38th Constitutional Convention in Detroit on Wednesday afternoon. He accepted his nomination and will run against incumbent Ray Curry and other candidates in the UAW's first direct election in more than 70 years.

The nomination is a tremendous achievement for autoworkers and other workers throughout the US and internationally. Will is fighting to develop a powerful rank-and-file movement to break the grip of the bureaucratic apparatus in the UAW, which has overseen decades of betrayals and defeats. His campaign for the building of rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace, and to unite workers internationally against the global corporations, is winning a powerful hearing among workers.

Two delegates at the convention made the nominations despite considerable intimidation by the UAW bureaucracy, which tried to keep Lehman off the ballot.

The first to nominate him was a veteran factory worker from Detroit. "I stand up to nominate Will Lehman from UAW Local 677 as president of the UAW," the worker said.

He used the rest of his allotted five minutes to criticize the "thieves" in the UAW bureaucracy, saying that members of the current UAW International Executive Board "covered up misdeeds." When UAW Vice President Terry Dittes and many delegates on the

floor tried to interrupt him, the worker stood his ground and declared that any IEB member who was complicit in the coverup of the corruption should "find a different career."

Several minutes later another delegate from Chicago came to the microphone and said, "I want to nominate Will Lehman for president. This guy wants to put the power back into our hands. He wants us to make the decisions about our union: what we do, how we do it. That's all he wants to do. Bureaucracy, he doesn't want that. He wants us to make the decisions about benefits, our service, internationally, with other unions, respectfully, equally, together."

For decades, UAW presidents and other top executives of the union were handpicked by the UAW bureaucracy and its ruling Administrative Caucus and rubber-stamped at constitutional conventions stacked with loyal hand-raisers.

This system was changed only because of the exposure of widespread corruption in the UAW, which led to the jailing of a dozen union officials, including two national presidents, and the installation of a court-appointed monitor who organized a referendum on direct elections. Ray Curry and the IEB (International Executive Board) adamantly opposed the change to one-man, one-vote, but UAW members defeated them by a 2-to-1 margin.

Despite this, the UAW bureaucracy hoped to restrict the list of presidential candidates to incumbent Ray Curry and, at most, a few loyal oppositionists, including Shawn Fain, an international servicing rep at the UAW's Solidarity House headquarters, who is backed by the Democratic Socialists of America-aligned Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) group.

Fain was nominated Wednesday along with Mark

“Gibby” Gibson, a UAW Local 163 shop chairman, who recently sold out the struggle by the Detroit Diesel workers. Also nominated was Brian Keller, a Stellantis worker in Warren, Michigan associated with the “UAW Real Talk” Facebook page.

The day before the nominations, Lehman and his supporters spoke with hundreds of autoworkers at the Stellantis (Chrysler) Warren Truck Assembly Plant. Workers warmly greeted Will during their afternoon shift change and many demanded that the delegates at the convention nominate Lehman so they would have a real choice in the elections.

Lehman is the only candidate who is fighting for the abolition of the corporate-controlled UAW apparatus and the establishment of rank-and-file power on the shop floor, through the formation of democratic rank-and-file factory and workplace committees and the mobilization of all workers to fight for massive wage increases, the restoration of cost-of-living protections, the ending of all tiers, immediate rollover of all part-time workers, and company-paid health care and pensions for all workers.

After his nomination, Will spoke to the WSWS about the program he would bring to workers across the US and internationally. “I will be fighting for workers to abolish the bureaucracy in the UAW, which acts like a parasitic layer on us and blocks our struggles or leads them to a dead end.

“I will be advancing the fight for the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), so workers can expand our struggles, connect them and fight in such a way that they can be wins for workers, not isolated losses. I want workers to vote for me, but these changes will only be possible if workers recognize the situation we’re in and what we need to do to get out of it. We need to build committees in every factory and workplace, communicate with each other, and build real solidarity, not the solidarity the UAW bureaucrats preach while they betray us. It has to be worker-to-worker, shop floor-to-shop floor and country-to-country solidarity.

“We can’t operate with national interests in mind but with class interests. Ray Curry works with the Biden administration and other Democrats, but neither party, Democrat nor Republican, represents the working class. We need to represent ourselves and build rank-and-file committees on that basis.”

Addressing the difficult challenges confronting the working class, Lehman continued, “Workers are not only battling the corporations, but a bureaucracy. The UAW has no intention of fighting inflation, which is now over 9 percent. They’re telling us to wait years to negotiate new contracts when we are taking huge cuts in real wages and the companies routinely ignore the contracts anyway.

“There is a looming world war with tensions in Ukraine and Taiwan, and the UAW wants to tie us behind Biden’s reckless military escalation. There is an ongoing pandemic that the government and the media want us to ignore because they want us in the factories making profits for them.

“Now there are the jobs cuts by Ford, Stellantis and GM and the threat of an economic recession. The UAW is indifferent to layoffs and has no intention to fight them. Instead, it plans to offer lower wages in the name of ‘saving jobs.’ But all the promises of job security by the UAW never amounted to anything. The same is true everywhere. Ford is shutting plants in Chennai, India and Saarlouis, Germany and the unions just accept it.

“The capitalist system doesn’t care about jobs but only maximizing profits and squeezing as much as it can from every worker. The unions support capitalism. But why operate under a system that protects company rights, not worker rights? We, the workers, keep society moving and we are the ones who can determine what type of society we want to live in. The most dangerous ideas for workers is to believe that what is will always be. If this capitalist system is not working, then we need to change the system.”



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