

Detroit Chrysler workers demand UAW delegates nominate Will Lehman

Our reporting team
26 July 2022

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

Autoworkers at the Stellantis (Chrysler) Warren Truck Assembly Plant met and spoke with United Auto Workers presidential candidate Will Lehman Tuesday afternoon. Workers denounced decades of UAW-backed concessions and called on delegates to nominate Lehman at the UAW's constitutional convention taking place in Detroit today.

The 34-year-old Pennsylvania Mack Trucks worker and his supporters spoke with and distributed campaign fliers to hundreds of workers during the afternoon shift change at the suburban Detroit factory.

"We know they got a whole gang and whole system behind them," one worker said about the UAW bureaucracy, "and its crappy the way they are doing us and especially the TPTs (temporary part-time workers).

"We are losing out in every contract. This is not what built Detroit. These are not the jobs that the working class depended on and made us what we were. We need new faces in there, but you know how difficult that is, there is a whole scheme behind this."

"Well, the good news is you can help me with that," Will replied. "I need a delegate to nominate me to run for president. I'm asking workers to contact their delegates and ask the delegates on video to nominate." Many of the delegates, Lehman said, "support a lot of what I say but they are afraid of the UAW bureaucracy hurting them essentially."

The worker grabbed the microphone and said, "Nominate Will Lehman. He's going to do some things and make some changes for us. It's time for a change, a lot of us know it, but are afraid to speak up. Let's do this thing."

So alienated are workers from the UAW bureaucracy that many did not even know or care that the UAW Constitutional Convention was taking place less than 10 miles away in downtown Detroit.

The contempt the UAW officialdom has for rank-and-file workers was on display Tuesday when delegates voted against a resolution calling for the abolition of the hated two-tier wage system. Agreed to by the UAW in the early 2000s, this has forced workers to labor alongside of each other even though one worker is making half the wage of his or her counterpart.

The UAW has also given GM, Ford and Stellantis a free hand to create an even more exploited tier of part-time temporary (TPT) workers who are forced to work for years with no rights. According to workers, as much as 40 percent of the workforce at the Warren Truck plant are TPTs.

In a discussion with John, a veteran worker nearing retirement, Will explained that he is fighting to unite US autoworkers with their brothers and sisters around the world. The nationalism of the UAW and other unions, he said, had allowed the companies to force workers in a race to the bottom. "I need delegates to nominate me so I can bring this campaign of worker solidarity around the world."

"Delegates put him on the ballot and let the people choose," John declared. "The rest should be our vote."

"Right, they have a one-man, one-vote, but it is not really democratic if they don't let me on the ballot, is it?" Will replied. "Not hardly," was the worker's answer.

A younger worker also stopped and talked to Will. She said, "TPTs want to be rolled over after 90 days. We work just as hard as full-timers, and probably a little more. It is very hot in the plant," she added. Will responded, "Grocery stores have air conditioners,

Walmart has it, why don't we have it? It's because we have the same UAW bureaucracy." UAW President Ray Curry and everybody at the UAW's Solidarity House headquarters, Will noted, "have air conditioning."

Workers need air conditioning, raises, cost-of-living increases every year, pensions and to overturn all the givebacks the UAW has handed to the companies, Will explained. "I agree with that," she replied. "It's like we have no union here. Best of luck to you."

"A lot of things are needed in the plant, and especially leadership, and I appreciate you stepping up to take that spot," another worker with over a decade in the plant told Will. "What do think about the leadership being workers' power on the shop floor?" Will asked him, adding, "What do you think about it being in the hands of every worker to decide the way forward for workers?"

The worker replied, "That's the way it should be, unfortunately with the way our leadership is I feel the union won't last and pretty much the company will run us over and do whatever they want... The UAW International has done nothing, just robbed us. I appreciate you standing up," he said.

"We've been dealing with health and safety problems, especially during COVID," another worker told Will. "We want to know if somebody has it around you, so you can protect yourself." He said that workers have to fight and win back what the UAW had given up, including large wage increases to protect workers against inflation.

Will asked the worker what raise he got in the UAW contract. "It was only 3 percent this year, and a lot of times they try to pacify you with a bonus. We should go back to three-year, instead of four-year contracts that take money out of our pockets."

The worker added that he hated the two-tier pay system. "You got two sets of tiers on the floor, and you turn around and say these people get a raise at a certain time and these people get a raise at a certain time. We have to go back when after 90 days everybody is on the same pay. We need to get rid of tiers, there is too much division. I don't understand why they ever agreed to it in the first place."

Will said, "It's because the UAW apparatus is pro-company, and the concessionary contracts they make do not hurt them sitting in Solidarity House when they

don't have any solidarity with the workers. That's why I'm running to abolish the apparatus. We don't need a bureaucracy lording over us, telling us what we can or can't fight for."

"The same thing with strike pay," Lehman added. "It was \$275, now it's \$400 a week, but it should be at full pay." The worker replied, "Yes, it should be, to be honest... How long has it been since we were on strike at Chrysler? The strike fund has been building up for years. Where has all the money gone?"

Another worker running into the plant told campaigners, "The delegates should nominate Will, so us UAW members can have a choice of who to vote for."

To find out more about Lehman's campaign, visit WillforUAWpresident.org.



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