

Support Will Lehman for UAW president!

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31 July 2022

On Wednesday afternoon, Will Lehman, a 34-year-old autoworker at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and a socialist, was nominated to run for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW). Lehman requires the broadest support from all workers in the UAW, along with workers throughout the US and internationally.

At the UAW Convention held in Detroit, Michigan, Lehman was nominated by two delegates, the maximum allowed, according to convention rules. As a result, he will now appear on the ballot in elections where 400,000 active and 500,000 retired union members will be eligible to vote.

In elections to be held via mail-in ballot this October-November, Lehman will challenge incumbent UAW President Ray Curry, a protégé of convicted ex-President Gary Jones; longtime UAW bureaucrat Shawn Fain; Brian Keller, a nationalist and anti-socialist; and Local 163 Shop Chairman Mark Gibson.

Lehman was nominated by one delegate from Local 174 in Detroit who denounced former UAW executives as “thieves” and the existing executive board for covering up corruption. Another delegate, from Chicago, said she was nominating Lehman because his campaign was opposed to the UAW bureaucracy and called for the international unity of the working class.

The UAW leadership brought immense pressure to bear on delegates to discourage them from nominating Lehman. The convention was an anti-democratic farce, in which the leaders waited until most delegates had left Detroit to rescind an earlier vote to increase strike pay. But so great is the crisis in the UAW created by its leadership’s criminal cooperation with the auto corporations that even delegates to this rigged convention broke ranks and voted to place Lehman on the ballot.

The intervention of Lehman and his supporters at the convention made clear that his campaign speaks for rank-and-file workers. Lehman brought a group of workers to lobby delegates and show that his campaign is the only one backed by the rank and file. At a rally held at Stellantis’ Warren Truck plant the day before the nomination, rank-and-file workers demanded that delegates allow Lehman on the ballot and expressed their anger over decades of UAW

betrayals.

In a statement posted after the nomination, Lehman said that his campaign “is not aimed at replacing one bureaucrat with another. We can’t fight for what we need without organizing ourselves.” It is necessary, he said, to form “rank-and-file committees in every workplace to place power where it belongs, with workers on the shop floor.”

A fight to unify all workers, in the US and internationally, and to carry out a real struggle against the corporations, Lehman added, requires a rebellion of rank-and-file workers. “The bureaucratic apparatus that exists only to suppress our struggle cannot be reformed. It must be swept away.”

Lehman’s campaign reflects a growing movement of workers to break free of the corporate-controlled apparatus, expressed in a series of overwhelming rejections of UAW-backed contracts and powerful strikes that the union has worked to suppress over the past year. At the same time, it will facilitate the development of this rank-and-file movement in the United States and across the world.

There is every indication that Lehman’s campaign will coincide with and benefit from a massive growth of the class struggle in the US, even as the union continues to tell workers the unbelievable lie that the UAW is stronger than ever and that each new contract includes “historic gains.”

In addition to calling for a rank-and-file rebellion against the apparatus, Lehman’s campaign has stressed two points:

First, it has opposed all forms of nationalism and called for the international unity of the working class. In statements and emails sent out to all UAW members, Lehman has endorsed the International Workers’ Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), an initiative launched by the International Committee of the Fourth International last May.

Second, the campaign has connected the fight for major economic gains with a struggle against the capitalist system, which is the source of inequality and poverty. In an email to the UAW membership sent before the convention, Lehman wrote, “I am a socialist. Socialism recognizes that society is divided into classes. There is a class war taking place right now, but only one class is fighting. Socialism means putting the world’s productive forces under the democratic control

of the working class and distributing resources not to enrich a handful of billionaires but to meet the needs of the whole human race.”

The statement explicitly attacked the subordination of the working class to the two capitalist political parties, who he said are “controlled by the ruling elite.” He added:

The UAW is a part of this network of political control aimed at depriving working people of any voice whatsoever. And I find it sickening that after decades in which we have been told there is “no money” for schools, public infrastructure or social services, the two parties—including politicians elected with UAW backing—find \$40 billion to escalate a war against Russia over Ukraine that could obliterate humanity.

The official nomination of a candidate running for UAW president on an explicitly socialist program is a historic milestone and an expression of the immense potential for the building of a mass revolutionary movement in the American working class.

In no other Western democracy has there been such a relentless war waged against the presence of socialists in the trade unions as in the United States. Since the anticommunist witch-hunts began in the 1940s, exploiting the rotten politics of the Stalinists, socialism has been completely excluded from the trade unions.

The unification of the AFL-CIO in 1955 was based on a repudiation of workers’ militancy, vicious anticommunism and the subordination of the working class the Democratic Party. This created the conditions for the transformation of the union apparatus in the late 1970s and 1980s into direct instruments of corporate management.

The working class, however, is beginning to fight back. The UAW campaign takes place amid an intense political and economic crisis. Prices are soaring, and wages are declining in real terms while the pandemic spreads without restriction. The Federal Reserve is raising interest rates in order to drive wages down, and the government is counting on the trade unions to force through contracts well below the rate of inflation, even as the government spends billions to arm the Ukrainian government in the war against Russia.

The ruling class is terrified of the consequences. The *New York Times*, speaking for the Democratic Party, published one article on the UAW convention which referred to Lehman only in passing. The *Times* went so far as to claim that all the candidates for president “agree on most of the key issues at stake in next year’s contract negotiations”—a

blatant lie.

As for the organizations around the Democratic Party and the union apparatus, they have maintained a complete silence on Lehman’s campaign. None of the many delegates aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) or Labor Notes came forward to nominate the only candidate running openly as a socialist. This is because these pseudo-left organizations, which represent privileged sections of the middle class, are entirely oriented to obtaining positions within an apparatus that serves as a police force over the working class.

The campaign of Will Lehman for UAW president shatters the official narrative of a right-wing working class, along with the racist politics of the pseudo-left. The working class is moving to the left, seeking a way to oppose the entire policy of the corporate and political establishment. The campaign demonstrates the enormous potential that exists for a rebellion against the pro-corporate union apparatus and the forging of a genuine, left-wing and socialist movement of the working class.

The success of the campaign, however, depends upon the active support of the entire working class. As Lehman stated to workers following the nomination, “I can’t do this alone, I am not a miracle worker. This campaign is not so much about me but about you. It will be successful to the extent that *you* get involved, that we develop through this campaign the organization and initiative to fight and to win.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* has endorsed the campaign of Will Lehman for president of the UAW. We call on all workers throughout the US and internationally to support it through the establishment of election committees in every workplace. Make the campaign as broadly known as possible. Only in this way can the campaign become a spearhead for a rank-and-file rebellion of workers against corporate exploitation and the entire capitalist system.

For more information on Will Lehman’s campaign, go to WillforUAWpresident.org.



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