Will Lehman, socialist candidate for UAW president, answers questions from autoworkers

WSWS Autoworker Newsletter
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Following his nomination last month to be on the ballot for UAW president, autoworker Will Lehman has received letters from workers throughout the US supporting his campaign and asking questions about his program.

The WSWS has endorsed Lehman's campaign. We are publishing below a selection of letters and responses from Lehman. The letters have been edited to ensure the anonymity of the workers.

For more information on Will Lehman's campaign, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.

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Hey Will,

My union reps and the company are as ONE! We don't have proper representation, there's too many concessions made for the company. I hope that you will make some much needed changes. We are struggling and the future generations will as well, if something is not done. Benefits need to be increased dramatically. We support Ford, yet they throw millions of dollars into an in-plant car wash system, lifts, overhead door dryers that never work. Yet, the economy doesn't fit our budget as our wages stay the same as living expenses rises!

Make it make sense, right! We need a team that will strike and make a statement to these companies. They lied years ago, and the union representation shook hands on the deal, really!

We need great leadership, you got my support, if you are serious about accountability of those hurting the UAW.

R

Dear R,

Thank you, but as I have stressed, I cannot do this alone, and I am not some kind of magic problem solver. Workers need to build rank-and-file committees to bring changes about. I agree that the future generations need us to push now more than ever for the betterment of material conditions for workers everywhere in the future.

The team I intend to build is composed of workers on the shop floor, that is my rank-and-file committee approach. I hope you will be interested in building a rank-and-file committee at your plant.

Yes, Ford is egregious in their exploitation while having no concern for workers. In July, I was on two calls with workers at Ford plants in India and Germany. These were with workers at plants that are both facing plant closures. Workers everywhere need to realize that our struggles are all connected. We have the power to save jobs and elevate our working conditions if we build rank-and-file committees and coordinate internationally. Please let me know your thoughts on the building of a rank-and-file committee at your plant.

Thank you,
Will Lehman

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Will,

How do you plan to change things in the UAW? The way it is, we pay dues as a formality to have slightly better healthcare and wages than non-union jobs. Dues are pretty much bribe money. I work at Mack, and we have lost every contract since Volvo took over. They wanted temps, and indirectly (thru 6 years of wage progression MOU) they got temps. Everything they want, they get.

The strike in 2019 was a fake. I won't cross a picket line, but rest assured I won't be part of nonsense fake strikes. Who the hell goes back to work when nothing is ratified? Volvo was planning down-weeks anyhow, and they let it go long enough to start receiving a little bit of bad press and then they called an end to it. Aside from all this we have a huge rat infestation at the plant. Everybody is telling the supervisor on everybody else. Nobody knows how to mind their own business. I applaud you for trying to fight, but I'll tell you what I think: The time has come and gone.

I think it's over.

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Yes, that is the way it is now, and if we do nothing things will continue to get worse until we are ground into the dust. I'm proposing workers do something, now, on the shop floor level. We need to group up into the rank-and-file committee that was started here last year when NRV was out on strike. There are many reasons for organizing in this way, principally so we have an open organization where everyone can freely speak about the actions we should take without being hindered by the UAW's typical losing strategy.

Secondly, we need rank-and-file committees so when it comes time to take action workers are the ones that will be in control of that action. Arguably, we should have formed a committee in 2019 and called for not returning until we had all the details of the agreement. We need to lead our own actions, not be misled under the leadership of a bureaucracy. Yes, the 2019 strike was manipulated, but we voted by 79% to strike. There wasn't anyone I knew at the time that told me they voted "no" to the strike authorization vote. The will was there, but it was misled. We need to be ready to fight again. And if we're going to win, we can't be misled again.

Whether things change or not depends on workers being willing to fight. If you are, I suggest you join up and help build. Get coworkers in that you know are solid. I'm not a lone great reformer. My turn is to the workers. The working class has the power to make monumental changes if we all decide to organize and fight.

I'm not running on the platform of "I alone can fix it," or "I will bring some new bureaucrats in with me to fix things." I'm trying to encourage

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workers to build on the floor because that's the only way it's going to happen. Our material conditions have been declining for quite some time, and this will continue to horrible extremes if we do nothing. There will be a breaking point when workers can take no more losses, and I'm trying to point the way forward now so we're in the best position to fight when that happens. We need to organize in a new way if there is to be any change.

Will Lehman

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We're pretty lucky in my opinion at our shop. We were working every two Saturdays and the 3rd off for a long time, but since Covid that's slowed down due to the "parts shortage." I'm a fairly new hire, but I've been union my entire adult life. I feel General Motors uses and abuses our temps. That's my main goal. Get back to 90 days, hire or fire, with a competing pay scale of a minimum of $20 an hour for the temps.

B

Dear B,

There was a time when workers fought and risked their lives for the 8-hour day and 40-hour week. Those hard-fought gains should have never been conceded, as well as equal pay for equal work and a family sustaining wage.

From where I stand, the working class generates all the profit so the working class should determine where it goes, naturally with equality at the forefront of that discussion. I tend to put it as: If a worker is doing a full-time job, a job that any worker at top rate could also potentially hold, they should be receiving top rate pay for the completion of that job. I'm not as concerned with the companies' "rights" of hiring and firing or their "right" to 90 days to decide to transfer temps to full-time. Those decision makers often do zero work, are used to the habitat of an air conditioned office and wouldn't know real work if they were staring at a real worker doing it.

I also don't agree with the "temp" status. If more workers are needed, there should be more workers. Temp status is a cheap way for a company to get out of paying a worker to do a full-time job. It is meant to divide the working class up, with the intention of sending all the ill-gotten profits to the lazy bureaucrats and shareholders that put in zero work.

The way we're going to get past concessions back is through the formation of rank-and-file committees, and it's up to workers like you who recognize there are gains to be made to build those committees. If you are interested in starting one, let me know and we can discuss that further.

Thank you,

Will Lehman

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Hello Will,

I have been encouraged by the emails about your campaign for UAW president. I agree wholeheartedly with your platform. It's well past time to put the power back in the hands of the rank-and-file.

I am a member of the UAW at Michigan Technological University. Throughout my years here, I have often felt that the union doesn't do enough for its members. In fact, it actively hampers upward mobility. Being in the union here is more damaging to my career and pay than if I were a salaried employee. As union employees, we are the lowest tier.

I have had to take on extra work without being compensated appropriately because my position is in the union. We don't get cost of living increases or significant raises of any kind. As someone who knows the value of their work and genuinely loves their job, it just feels insulting. In fact, right now there are so many open union positions on campus that they are offering $1,000 signing bonuses; they are desperate for employees, but don't take care of the ones they have. If union employees were paid better wages, there wouldn't be so many open positions.

It's been frustrating and disheartening fighting what feels like a losing battle against an organization that doesn't do the bare minimum for its members. Many of us have given up on any hope of positive change.

Thank you for your time, and I truly hope that your campaign is successful. I believe you could bring some much needed change to the UAW.

Sincerely,

K

Hello K,

I do want to stress that I alone cannot put the power back in the hands of the rank-and-file and that change will only occur to the extent that workers recognize the need to fight for it and organize rank-and-file committees. Have you been able to share any of the campaign messaging with your coworkers and if so, what do they think? I would be very interested to know if there is interest in forming a rank-and-file committee where you work. You are not alone in the UAW bureaucracy failing you either. The bureaucracy at the international and local level fails everyone that pays them dues, some worse than others.

I had more than one coworker die from COVID after being infected in our plant. One worker, William D, passed after Thanksgiving, and when our rank-and-file committee reached out to our local about it they didn't even know he had passed. Mack Trucks, where I work, had a supervisor canvass me for his job two days later, and he was just as casual about the position being open as any other position being open. That type of indifferent and negligent attitude towards social murder is a large part of why I am running.

Our continuously worsening economic condition is tied to my running as well, as is the popularizing of workers doing the one thing that can bring about change. That is the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, the need for abolishing capitalism and bringing about socialism. It would help my campaign's effort greatly if you could spread the word on social media and in your workplace.

Thank you,

Will Lehman

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How do you feel about how the janitorial members are treated i.e, contract, treated as if we took Big Three jobs from them, wages, etc.

P

Hello P,

At Mack they put the janitors in a separate, lower tier, classified as "General Maintenance." In my opinion any worker on the floor doing a job that is deemed its own position should not be paid less than the rest of the workers on the floor.

One of the biggest things the companies have created over the years, with the blessing of the UAW bureaucracy, is glaring inequality. They divide workers up and seek to foster the growth of anti-worker talk among us workers. Any time you hear one worker saying why another worker doesn't deserve this or that form of equality, that is the type of talk I'm referring to.

That kind of talk is to get workers distracted, to view our own working class brothers and sisters as enemies while distracting from the hundreds of thousands of dollars paid out to UAW bureaucrats, and in some cases tens of millions of dollars paid out to corporate bureaucrats. They use that kind of talk about workers in other countries too, when no matter what country you're from, what should unite us is working class solidarity.

Prime examples of the pay of the real parasitic culprits the companies don't want you to see are the total income of GM CEO Mary Barra, Volvo's CEO Martin Lundstedt, Flex-N-Gate CEO Shahid Khan and the wealth of HarperCollins owner Rupert Murdoch. The money they are gorging themselves off of is the money we're generating but never sees our pockets because we are divided on the floor and don't understand the need for our class unity, and lack historical working class knowledge that would lead to us having a better understanding of the working class unity

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we need.

In short, there is a lot to be said to get to the understanding of working class solidarity but I would say it begins there, and every worker, the ones generating all the profits, should have a democratic say in how those profits are generated and a decent living afforded to them no matter where they are or what type of work they do. To get to that point though we need to start grouping up in rank-and-file committees and educating ourselves on the way to achieve that equality. It will not be achieved through reliance on corrupt trade unionism leading the way.

Thank you,
Will Lehman

For more information on Will Lehman's campaign, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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