

“He wants to abolish this horrible tiered labor system”—GM Flint temp worker supports Will Lehman for UAW president

Our reporters
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General Motors, Ford and Stellantis (Chrysler) employ tens of thousands of low-paid and highly exploited temporary workers. Due to the pandemic-driven labor shortage, many temps work 12-hour days or more.

In 2019, 48,000 GM workers conducted a 40-day strike primarily to end this system of indentured servitude. The struggle was betrayed by the UAW, which collects dues from these workers but does nothing to protect their jobs and conditions.

Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president Will Lehman is calling for the conversion of all temps to full-time status and the elimination of wage and benefit tiers. To fight for this and other necessary demands, Lehman is urging workers to form rank-and-file committees to abolish the pro-company UAW bureaucracy and transfer the power to workers on the shop floor.

A newly hired temporary part-time (TPT) worker at the GM Flint Assembly plant spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the conditions temps face and why he is supporting Lehman's campaign for UAW president.

“After working here for several months, I have come to know and see what horrible conditions exist for workers. These conditions create not only an extremely unequal workplace but are dangerous.

“The job advertisement indicated that after two years of work, I would automatically be hired in full-time. Upon attending the job orientation and starting work, I quickly found this to be completely untrue. Management and UAW officials told me that if I was not laid off, I should expect to be hired in as a full-time temp after three to four years minimum. I would then have to wait at least another three years to be considered a non-temp seniority worker.

“In general, the UAW bureaucrats and management seem very distant and hard to talk to. This attitude was especially shown at my orientation when our UAW local president didn't even bother to show up for a scheduled presentation.

“Despite the last 2019 national UAW agreement implementing a path for part-time temp workers to become full-time temps after two years of part-time temp labor, many of my coworkers remain part-time even after working this long. Added to this is a clause in the agreement allowing GM to reset the time logged as a temp worker if you are laid off for more than 30 days.

A permanent temporary workforce

“This creates a way for GM to permanently keep people as temp workers by hiring them back after 31 days. Many of my temp coworkers have had this happen to them. Instead of hiring every temp worker in full-time for seniority positions, GM management and the UAW bureaucracy enforce a kind of competition for the temps to gain seniority over one another in the hopes of winning a full-time seniority position.

“Labor is organized into several tiers, with a significant portion of workers being of the lowest part-time temporary labor tier. Despite workers of every tier doing the same work, temps and those without seniority are paid substantially lower wages and receive little or no benefits aside from the most rudimentary health care plan compared to their seniority and legacy counterparts.

“In addition to the insulting pay inequality is the fact that part-time workers are only given 24 hours of unpaid time off a year, but only after working a minimum of 12 continuous months. Part-time temps do not have a guaranteed and stable work schedule either, necessitating a second full-time job for many. It is common for people to have 72 or more combined hour workweeks between working here and their other jobs. Upon arriving at work, we are told then and there what particular job to do.

“All these and other problems at GM Flint Assembly and other workplaces in general are reasons why I am supporting Will Lehman in the upcoming UAW presidential election. Will Lehman's campaign demands the reinstatement of pensions and COLA increases, as well as massive wage increases. He also demands the abolition of the horrible, tiered labor system and the hiring in as full-time with benefits of all part-time and full-time temporary workers.

“Will Lehman is not running with hopes of reforming the bureaucratic UAW but rather rightfully insists on opposing it entirely. To win back concessions, end unsafe working conditions, and stop the spread of COVID-19, workers in every factory and workplace need to form rank-and-file committees and coordinate a mass opposition movement against the UAW bureaucracy and the auto companies.

“I agree when he says workers need to reject the nationalism of the UAW and appeal internationally to autoworkers abroad. Only

by opposing the UAW bureaucracy and connecting the struggles fought by rank-and-file committees in every workplace to a larger struggle internationally with workers in other nation-states can the transnational auto companies be opposed. Will Lehman is the only candidate running on this basis.”

Continuing to describe conditions, the worker said, “Safety is no less of an issue than the unequal treatment of workers here. This was immediately clear at my job orientation when management and UAW officials spent much effort in describing how ‘we are responsible’ for our own safety. They would repeat this over and over to offload the responsibility of ensuring our safety from themselves onto us.

“Not long before I started work at Flint Assembly, someone had an accident where their legs were crushed. The UAW officials at orientation mentioned this and blamed the person injured as being solely responsible for the accident. Contrary to their story, I have received numerous accounts from other coworkers describing this person being rushed by management to do their job faster, and to work on broken machines while the line was in operation. I still frequently observe this practice.

“Less severe but no less unacceptable physical injuries and medical incidents regularly occur. Many of the jobs are very physically strenuous and can result in repeated stress related injuries. Management is supposed to enforce frequent job rotation changes, however in practice I rarely see this happen.

“When I initially applied for this job, similar to the lies about the timeframe for being hired in full-time, were the claims about COVID-19 safety and preventative measures. I have not seen one person have their temperature checked or asked to volunteer symptoms since working here. Alongside this is the total lack of any enforced COVID-19 safety measures inside the plant. No attempt at social distancing occurs and, as far as I know, heavily used break and station areas are not sanitized as they are supposed to be. There is zero enforcement of any mask mandate, and almost no one volunteers to wear a mask on their own.”

Discussing Lehman’s fight for socialist policies, the worker said, “Workers must also know and understand that Lehman is a socialist. Lehman’s campaign seeks to revive the traditions of socialism in the working class and help workers build a new movement independent of the degenerated and bureaucratic UAW and of the auto companies.

Flint Sit-Down Strike in 1936

“The historic struggles fought by workers against the auto companies are rooted in the traditions of socialism and should be learned from. One such struggle that bears great significance, especially given where I work, is the Flint Sit-Down Strike.

“The great Flint Sit-Down Strike saw socialist-minded autoworkers militantly oppose the exploitation and brutal conditions imposed upon them by the auto companies. The workers understood that to improve their conditions and defend their interests, they would need to take up the fight for socialism

and oppose the capitalist system.

“In opposition to the company, workers collectively organized and formed the UAW. Unfortunately, the UAW long ago abandoned this legacy and is now fully integrated with the auto companies, functioning to curtail working class opposition against the companies and their interests.

“Over the last several decades, the development of globalized production, the economic basis of the UAW that once allowed it to defend and even gain rights and concessions for workers has been compromised. The UAW and other unions have been transformed into labor contractors, integrated with corporate management, and work side by side with GM and the other auto companies to ensure continuous profit margin increases as well as our permanent subordination to the company.

“The unions not only refuse to but are incapable of appealing to workers in other nation-states. GM and the other auto companies are fully international organizations that employ workers all over the world, yet the UAW claims that to secure our jobs and factories from closure, we need to compete with GM and other autoworkers elsewhere in other nation-states, thereby maintaining rising profits for the company. This mechanism arbitrarily divides workers along national borders and ensures our continual subordination to the will of the company based on profit accumulation and on the decline of working conditions.

“The struggle against oppression and exploitation in factories and other workplaces must be connected with the struggle against the global capitalist system as a whole. It is the drive for private profit accumulation by the auto companies, as well as the union bureaucracy, under capitalism that creates the basis for their antagonism with workers.

“The companies constantly seek to lower the cost of labor with wage cuts, concession losses, and other measures, while utilizing the union bureaucracy to police workers, contain, and suppress opposition against these attacks. The executives and bosses at GM own the means of production and extract profits from our laboring. Socialism entails transforming these institutions from being driven by the accumulation of private profit and of the ownership of private property to the social needs of all people.

“Through the rank-and-file committees coordinated on an international level with the help of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), workers can enter into the class struggle and fight for socialism and the end to the capitalist system. This is an integral part of Will Lehman’s campaign. Workers should vote for him in the upcoming election and build the independent rank-and-file committees.”



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