

“The union doesn’t exist in the plant”: Powerful support for Will Lehman at Ford Kentucky Truck Plant

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For more information on Lehman’s campaign for UAW president, visit WillforUAWPresident.org. On Saturday, August 27 at 5 p.m. Eastern, Will Lehman will be holding a live online Q&A. Learn more and register to attend.

Will Lehman won a powerful response from Ford workers at the Kentucky Truck Plant Thursday for his campaign for president of the United Auto Workers. Over 8,400 workers are employed at the giant factory in Louisville, which manufactures Ford’s super duty trucks and large SUVs.

Lehman and supporters campaigned at the plant gate entrances during the early morning and afternoon shift changes. Ford workers were more than anxious to denounce the UAW for betraying their interests. They welcomed the opportunity to discuss Will’s program of empowering workers on the shop floor through the building of a network of rank-and-file factory committees.

“I agree that it is time for a change. The top leadership is not working for anybody except themselves,” Gary, a young worker exclaimed.

“The union doesn’t exist in the plant,” said JP, a veteran worker. “They do not enforce work rules. You never see a committeeman. They have no presence on the shop floor. This used to be a militant local. But you can’t stand your ground if you don’t have the backing of the union.”

Will replied, “There are two layers in the UAW. There are the workers and there is the bureaucracy. They turned the UAW from a workers’ organization into a big business. The UAW International decides everything, and workers have no say. They control the strike fund and pay workers next to nothing to starve us

back to work. These assets belong to the workers so we can fight.”

Agreeing with this, a young worker, Jordan, with a few years at the plant said, “The UAW officials take our money so they can eat good, drive fancy cars and go on golf trips. They are living the best life. It’s a good idea to get the workers together to fight, but it’s going to be hard. The UAW and Ford are a small clique. They should all be in jail by now; instead, they are making us pay for their defense attorneys with our union dues.”

“Yes, it is going to take a fight,” Will replied. “But when workers realize they have nothing left to give they will decide to organize or perish.”

“The UAW is totally corrupt,” another worker said. “I’ve been working here 27 years, and things haven’t gotten any better in a long time, only worse. The reps here are particularly bad. We don’t have a cafeteria to sit and eat during our lunch break. It’s ridiculous. Many times we sit on boxes on the factory floor during our breaks. Sometimes they cart off the boxes, and then we have nothing. The local hasn’t done a thing about it. They ignore our complaints. One time, some of us took over the lunchroom from management, just went in sat down and started eating. This is the kind of action we need.”

A worker leaving his shift shouted, “Anyone who understands the importance of returning COLA has got my vote! I’m not seeing it anywhere else. This is big!”

In several discussions, Will stressed the need for workers to unite internationally against global corporations like Ford, which pit workers against each other in a bidding war to see who will work for the worst wages and conditions. Instead, Will said, US,

Mexican, Canadian and all workers had to link together through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

“Sound good to me!” a worker replied. “I think workers everywhere have got to band together; otherwise we don’t stand a chance. We have the same problems and can work together to solve them. Nothing will get done unless the working people get it done. Thank you for coming out here.”

Speaking to another two workers, Will said, “Ford is closing plants in Saarlouis, Germany and Chennai, India. We need to link up with those workers to defend all jobs. Instead, the IG Metall in Germany and UGT in Spain carried out a bidding war that pits workers against each other to secure an electric vehicle model. They forced workers in Spain to take huge concessions and Ford decided to close the Germany plant.”

“That’s what they did to us in 2010,” a veteran worker replied. “We wouldn’t go along with Lear’s plans to cut our wages from \$21 to \$11, so Lear closed the plant and moved production to Hammond, Indiana. UAW Local 43-7 didn’t do anything to stop it. I agree with you, but this is going to be hard to do.”

His coworker raised a question with Will. “You say we have to unite internationally, but the workers in Mexico are always going to accept lower wages. To them, \$10 an hour is a huge wage.”

Will said Mexican workers had to feed their families too and they were revolting against the pro-company unions too. “But the UAW does not want you to know about that because they want you to think the Mexican workers are your enemies.” Will pointed to the 2019 wildcat strike wave at the auto parts plants in Matamoros and the refusal of GM workers in Silao, Mexico to work overtime during the 2019 GM strike in the United States. “We need to build ties with workers in Mexico who are also fighting to break free from pro-company unions just like the UAW.”

The workers said the UAW was trying to pit Kentucky Truck workers and workers at the Ohio Assembly Plant near Cleveland in a bidding war against each other for new truck production.

Will responded, “This is going to continue to happen until workers link together in the US and around the world. The UAW leaders and all my opponents in this election defend capitalism. I am a socialist.

“There are many misconceptions about socialism. To

put it simply, capitalism is for the private profit of the few, which they get off the workers. Socialism is about human need.”

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