

UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman concludes historic tour of US auto plants with online meeting

Joseph Kishore
28 August 2022

The World Socialist Web Site has endorsed Will Lehman's campaign for UAW president. For more information and to get involved, visit WillForUAWPresident.org.

More than 150 workers and supporters attended an online meeting Saturday with United Auto Workers presidential candidate Will Lehman. Lehman took questions from autoworkers throughout the country and explained his fight to mobilize a rank-and-file movement against the UAW apparatus.

The meeting followed a historic tour of Lehman to auto plants in the US Midwest and Southeast.

This tour included visits to Ford's Dearborn Truck plant on Sunday; three Chrysler/Stellantis plants in the Detroit suburbs on Monday; GM's Flint Assembly plant on Tuesday; the picket lines of striking teachers in Columbus, Ohio on Wednesday; Ford's Kentucky Truck plant in Louisville on Thursday; and Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia on Friday.

Lehman issued several video statements in the course of his tour, including on the 1932 Ford Hunger March in Dearborn; the 1936-37 Flint Sit-Down Strike and the role of socialists in leading it; and on the need to mobilize all workers behind the striking Columbus, Ohio educators.

In the course of the tour, hundreds of workers signed up to support Lehman's campaign. At every plant he visited, Lehman encountered enormous support among rank-and-file workers for a real fight against intolerable conditions and the UAW apparatus that is responsible for enforcing them.

One worker at Dearborn Truck summarized the sentiments of rank-and-file workers when he told Lehman, "The people in the [UAW] leadership positions think they are on Easy Street because they don't have to do anything... The union is a business for them."

The meeting on Saturday was attended by autoworkers from Ford's Dearborn Truck, Cleveland Engine and Kentucky Truck plants, Chrysler's Belvidere Assembly and Warren Truck plants; GM's Flint Assembly plant; Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, where Lehman works; and John Deere, among other workplaces. There were also educators, health care workers, service workers, students and retirees in attendance.

"My campaign is about abolishing the UAW apparatus," Lehman said in opening the meeting. "The UAW is comprised of two layers—the workers who generate all the profits and pay all the dues, and a layer of bureaucrats... Right now, [the UAW] acts like a big business, and it works to protect the companies' interests.

"Lots of workers I've spoken to have said that the UAW is in the company's pocket. When they say that, it means the bureaucracy. It's not the workers who are in the companies' pockets; it's the bureaucrats, and that layer needs to be abolished."

Lehman said his campaign calls for "full-rank-and file control over all UAW assets along with bargaining and vote counting. We've generated all those assets by paying dues, and we should be the ones saying what we do with those assets, not the bureaucrats."

He added, "There needs to be leadership in every plant, rank-and-file committees in every industry. This campaign is not only about autoworkers, it is about every worker, about bringing that class consciousness to workers worldwide, because that is how you win."

In response to a worker who asked about his position on wage increases, Lehman said that all workers required a 50 percent wage increase to make up for past concessions, along with mandatory cost-of-living adjustments to keep pace with soaring inflation.

Lehman also called for the abolition of all tiers and the transfer of temporary workers to full-time. "You start out at 75 percent of a top rate job, for some workers it is much worse," he said. "The company would absolutely lose their mind if you did three out of four jobs that you were supposed to do. Yet they deem it acceptable to pay you that. That's got to be ended. Temporary Part-Time Status has to be ended.

"But it is not only ending it, it's how you fight for that. You can promise anything you like, but the reality is that you need an international movement to get that done."

A Stellantis (Chrysler) worker with 35 years on the job from Michigan offered his congratulations to Lehman for his initiative in launching the campaign. "The corruption in the

UAW went so far and so deep, and it is still unresolved,” the worker said. “It just goes on and on and on, from the vice president of the UAW down to our local treasurer, who stole \$2 million dollars.”

Lehman explained that the corruption in the UAW was connected to the corporatist relationships established between the union and the companies. “The closer the UAW got to the companies, when there started to be a UAW-GM, a UAW-Ford, and they started to have stocks and were sitting on the boards of these companies, they started thinking in a company-type mindset. Their interests are now tied to the companies.”

Lehman also spoke powerfully on the history of the class struggle and the UAW, referencing the Flint Sit-Down Strike of 1936-37, which was led by socialists. He noted that the Roosevelt administration backed the dispatch of National Guard troops against the strikers.

“The state has long been allied with the companies, and they are willing to kill to protect private profit. That is how you know it is capitalism... It is not based on a system of human need, like I am proposing,” Lehman said. “Any gains made by the working class were won by the workers themselves,” he added.

A Temporary Part-Time (TPT) worker who has worked for two years at GM’s Flint Assembly plant spoke and denounced the UAW for not doing anything for temporary workers. “It’s like everybody forgot about the temps.”

“The UAW talks about solidarity,” Lehman replied, “but what they really want is fealty. They want us to be loyal to the UAW apparatus.” He called for the elevation of all workers to full-time, with full pay and benefits. “No one should be temporary, part time... That was one of the concessions given up [by the UAW].”

Another topic that Lehman addressed in the meeting is the role of the Biden administration, which has intervened in the past few weeks to block a strike by more than 100,000 rail workers and shut down the strike by Columbus, Ohio teachers.

“My campaign is hostile to the Democrats and the Republicans,” Lehman said. “My appeal is to all sections of the working class... The government is going to be hostile to us, just as they were with the Flint Sit-Down Strike and the Hunger March... It is not a workers’ state, it is a capitalist state.”

In response to a question from a retired autoworker, Lehman said that other candidates for the UAW president claim that they will be able to make change just by being voted into office. “We have been fed that lie for a very long time.

“I am the only candidate telling workers that it is not just about waiting for change. The Democrats and Republicans say that by voting in an election we will stop whatever inequality exists. They aren’t interested in that... That’s why I am a socialist. That is why I am not voting for a pro-capitalist party.”

Lehman made a powerful appeal for the international unity of the working class and the building of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. He pointed to the

growth of the class struggle throughout the world, including in the UK, India and Sri Lanka.

“There are workers in other countries who are trying to gain exactly the same things,” he said, “and we would be much stronger were we to join up with each other and enter into struggle together.”

Opposing all forms of nationalism, Lehman said, “If you want to be proud of something, be proud that you are a member of the working class... be proud of generating working class solidarity. That is the way for us all to win, by recognizing that it doesn’t matter where you are from or what language you speak, we are all on the same page.”

Lehman also stated his opposition to imperialist war. “I don’t support any kind of shipments of armaments, billions of dollars being shipped [to Ukraine to fight a US-NATO war against Russia],” he said. “It’s all people at the top” creating these wars, he added. “The way forward for us is solidarity on the working class level.”

In concluding the meeting, Lehman stressed the enormous opposition among all sections of the working class. “From a lot of the workers I spoke to, I have heard a lot of inspirational things.

“We might downplay the real backing we’d have turning to the workers in our class. But that has all been pushed on us by these bureaucracies and by the ruling class, that the power isn’t there. The power absolutely is.

“There are a lot of workers who say a lot of the same things I do when I go to plants. They are going to be stepping forward, and they already have. I have gotten hundreds of people signing up for this campaign... For anyone thinking that all these things are great, but we are only thinking them alone, I assure you that we are not.

“All of us know the score at this point, and we know what is coming. We can do this if we organize.”

For more information on Will Lehman’s campaign, to donate and get involved, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.



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