“A vote for anyone else is a vote for more inequality in our workplace”: Toledo Jeep supplemental employee backs Will Lehman’s campaign for UAW president

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The following letter was sent to Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker running for UAW president, from a supplemental employee working at Jeep Truck in Toledo, Ohio. It is printed with permission.

The World Socialist Web Site *has endorsed Lehman’s campaign. For more information, go to WillforUAWPresident.org*

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The preamble of the UAW’s constitution states, “Within the orderly processes of such government lies the hope of the worker in advancing society toward the ultimate goal of social and economic justice” and, that ... “all men and women are created equal.” These are considered the core principles of the union and its membership.

Unfortunately, reality doesn’t always mirror belief. UAW leadership has allowed the factories it represents to become a microcosm of American society, and the workers are anything but equal.

I work at the Toledo Plant. We make the Jeep Wrangler and the Jeep Gladiator.

I’ve been a supplemental employee (SE, formerly TPT) for more than three years, but less than seven years. I can’t narrow it down more, because SEs are at-will employees. Criticism of the company and union is enough to be terminated. People have been terminated for saying things on the Jeep Facebook page.

There are approximately 2,000 SEs at our facility. About one third of the total workforce are supplemental.

In 2019 they changed the name from temporary part time, because it implied that being a TPT was part time and that it was temporary. Both of those statements are untrue. A large portion work six days. We frequently work Sunday, which as an SE you will be forced to do regardless of whether you work six or three days. More and more it seems like it won’t be temporary either, and in reality we are perma-temps.

Recently we received an all call about Stellantis wanting to create a healthy work place by giving SEs flexibility in their schedules. When you went to the link they sent us, there is no flexibility at all. The choice is to work three days and Sunday or work six days and Sunday. Same schedule that is always available to SEs.

The turnover for new SEs is very high. This work isn’t for everyone, and people come in and are thrown on the line for 10 hours a day, 6-7 days a week. I remember the first summer I worked, we went two months without a day off. It grinds you down, and there is no work/life balance. I don’t want to make it seem like seniority employees don’t face these issues too, because they do.

The high turnover benefits the UAW apparatus. Each new worker pays an initiation fee and monthly dues from their first check. They hire a hundred people, fifty quit. They hire fifty more. The UAW likes it for the dues, and Stellantis likes it for the cheap labor.

SEs pay dues, and we can vote in elections, but that’s about the extent of our rights as members of the UAW. We’re not allowed to run for any union offices. We don’t receive SUB pay when laid off. If we are sick or injured and take a medical leave, there is no medical pay.

Even little things are unavailable to SEs. For example, we stand at work for up to 10 hours a day. Your footwear is very important to your health and

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wellness. Plant Safety will give you shoe inserts for free, once a year. This is to help with sore feet due to all the standing. Supplemental Employees are not eligible for free inserts. A truck used to come to the plant once a year and sell work shoes and boots. Workers could receive a nice discount on them. If you're a supplemental, you do not receive this benefit.

The tier system created these inequalities in UAW plants. The same inequalities that the union's own constitution says it seeks to rid the world of. How can they get rid of inequality in the world if they can't even accomplish it in their own factories? Even worse, they actually pushed these inequalities on the people they are supposed to fight for.

This next contract is very important for membership. We are facing many issues from the automakers. They are intent on pivoting towards electric vehicles. They will push to close more plants and reduce the workforce. They will demand austerity for us, record profits for them, while our pay stagnates and is eaten up by inflation. We need to be ready to resist these demands.

All is not doom and gloom, however. We have been given an opportunity to vote for a new UAW President in the coming international election. This is why I'm voting for Will Lehman for international president. A vote for anyone else is a vote for more inequality in our workplace, and more of the status quo.

For more information on Will Lehman's campaign for UAW president, go to WillforUAWPresident.org

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