

GM Flint Assembly workers denounce UAW efforts at intimidation in election campaign

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The WSWS has endorsed Will Lehman's campaign for UAW president. For more information on Lehman's campaign, go to WillforUAWpresident.org.

Autoworkers from GM Flint Assembly in Michigan reacted angrily to attempts by United Auto Workers officials to block their discussions with UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman.

During a recent campaign tour, Lehman visited GM Flint Assembly and talked with rank-and-file workers who expressed support for his campaign, which includes the call for the abolition of the UAW apparatus and the transfer of power to the shop floor.

During the campaign, Local 598 District Committeeman Sean Meachem began to intimidate workers who were speaking with Lehman and his supporters. Meachem called GM security to try to remove the campaign team from the plant and also instructed a woman wearing a UAW shirt to take photographs of Lehman, campaign volunteers and workers.

On September 1, Lehman sent a letter to the court-appointed Monitor overseeing the elections demanding an investigation into the incident. "This is an overt act of intimidation against workers who became fearful that they would be retaliated against at work for even speaking to me or taking a leaflet," he wrote.

"I had no idea the union would threaten us for talking to him," a young woman with ten years at the GM plant said. "I don't see any reason to be bullied. Every first of the month, my union dues come out of my check. I am paying them."

"Some higher-ups in the union get so caught up with their power, they forget what they are there for," she added. "When [the GM plant in] Springhill, Tennessee went down a shift, they were contracting all the material handling jobs through Ryder—outsourcing jobs

inside the plant. Why is the union letting this go on? Giving our jobs away. Now they are starting to outsource here in Flint, a little at a time. What about bringing COLA back?"

She said, "I have three granddads who are UAW, two at GM, one at Ford." When her older family members hired in, she said, they could start a family on a single paycheck. Conditions today are a glaring contrast. "Most temps today are teenagers. For what they get paid, they can't live on their own."

Despite the efforts of the UAW apparatus, Lehman's campaign is winning powerful support at the plant. "You were on the north gate," one worker said. "We're by the south gate, and my co-workers were just talking about everything you are saying."

The UAW apparatus is doing all it can to prevent workers from even knowing about the election, in an effort to suppress the vote of the rank-and-file.

"I didn't know the union was dogging you guys," the worker said. "They still haven't said anything about the election. They should have a crew meeting or a union meeting right here in the shop. But we wouldn't even know about it if you hadn't come. [Will Lehman's] campaign is the only way we heard anything."

The worker went on to describe the pressure for strike action that is already building in the plant more than a year before the contract expires. "I was just thinking about that three percent raise. That is nothing. Look at the price of gas and food. It's just crazy.

"They are making a ton of money, record profits, off of us, and we get nothing. We need a lot more money for working here. A lot of workers in here are saying the exact same thing you are talking about."

A co-worker spoke about the terrible working conditions at the plant. "There is just no relief. My

hands were cramping up every day until I had to have surgery for carpal tunnel syndrome. It was too painful.”

Several workers also replied to an email Lehman sent out to all UAW members on the effort at intimidation.

One worker wrote, “Hello Will, I just read through the ordeal you had in Flint. Damn shame! I pray that somehow you get a fair election! This union is not what it used to be and should be. That was before my time, but my grandfather would tell me stories that were inspiring. He would say that alone we are no match, but as a group we are unmatched. Their brotherhood ran deep. May God bless you to carry on, to be strong and resilient and fight for us that feel our voices don’t matter. Help us become unmatched again!

Another wrote: “I’m confused as to why fellow union members would do that! Also reaching out to management to help/assist in the attempt to remove you from the grounds.

“My local isn’t acknowledged by the UAW international nor does our international rep work with our current chairman from what I’m informed. I’m a member of the UAW Local 933 Allison Transmission in Speedway, Indiana, and it’s depressing and frightening how much it’s changed here and how weak our local in general has become...

“I feel the UAW as a whole has lost its purpose and what it was created and formed to do for laborers. I feel they have become more a business which the top members in the high up positions are only out for themselves and out to fill their pockets after learning how easily they can lie and cheat without being caught until they become too careless.”

For more information on Lehman’s campaign, go to WillforUAWpresident.org.



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