

# UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman discusses socialism with libertarian worker (and other correspondence)

**Will Lehman**

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*Every week, UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman, a socialist rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker from Macungie, Pennsylvania, receives letters from workers in the UAW and in other industries on his campaign to abolish the bureaucracy and give power to the workers on the shop floor. What follows is a selection of his latest correspondence.*

*For more information on Will Lehman's campaign, visit [WillforUAWPresident.org](http://WillforUAWPresident.org).*

*You will have my vote if you take politics out of the union we don't need our money going towards presidential candidates or other government candidates*

*B*

Hello B,

I am totally opposed to the UAW giving any support to the Democrats or Republicans or any single one of their candidates for any office, from president of the United States to local mayors. Those parties represent the banks and corporations, the forces that back the auto companies. The integration of the UAW into the Democratic Party over the course of the last 50 years has spelled disaster for workers. It has meant decades of plant closures, wage cuts and attacks on retirees. Biden is a representative of the credit card industry who has overseen massive cuts to corporate taxes over the course of his many decades in power. Of course, the Republicans are no better. Trump is an aristocrat, a job cutter, a speculator and a fraud. He has always been an enemy of working people.

We *do* need working class politics. The working class is the social force that produces all of society's wealth, but we have no representation in government. We represent that bottom 90 percent of society, but our interests are never represented by anyone in government at a state, federal or local level. I believe this needs to change. That means fighting to mobilize the power of the working class against both Democrats and Republicans. Our movement must remain independent of these two parties or our strength will be sapped and we will be defeated. That's what history shows, including the history of the UAW itself.

I am a socialist. The Democrats and Republicans both lie about what socialism is, because they don't want workers to like it. But I have learned that socialism is the politics of the working class. Socialism means equality. It means putting control of society in the hands of working people all over the world, so that the economy is run not to enrich a few billionaires and shareholders, but to meet human need. You don't have to be a socialist to support me, and our movement will include workers of many different political views, but I do think it is important to say what socialism really is. If you believe society is unequal, that the wars are waged for profit, and that the corporations have too much power, then

chances are you are a socialist yourself. If you have any questions about this I am happy to answer them. Send me your phone number and we can set up a time to talk.

Are you interested in joining my election committee and helping explain what my campaign is about to your co-workers?

Thank you for writing me.

Fraternally,  
Will Lehman

*The UAW member responded:*

*I'm an independent but lean towards libertarian party. Can you send me more information by chance?*

Will replied:

On the question of libertarianism: As a socialist, I base my political perspective on the objective conflict between socio-economic classes. The main division in our world today is between the working class—the social force which produces everything, and without which society cannot function—and the capitalist class, a tiny financial oligarchy which privately owns the means of production and hoards all the wealth created by the working class. One of the greatest factors driving the attacks on democratic rights today is the colossal economic inequality that has developed over the past 40 years. Democracy is more and more incompatible with a situation in which three billionaires own more than the bottom half of the population, 160 million people.

Libertarianism, in contrast, evades and covers up the class divisions in society. While its proponents claim to uphold “individual rights” above all else, under capitalism, this is used as a cover for pursuing policies to remove all remaining constraints on profit-making and the exploitation of the working class. To put it bluntly, libertarianism represents the class interests of those who are exploiting us. The starkest example of this currently is Elon Musk, the owner of Tesla and a self-described libertarian, a man who is “worth” a quarter of a trillion dollars (all of it derived ultimately from workers' labor), and someone who oversees horrific sweatshop conditions in his plants. There are workers who are paid so little that they are homeless and sleep in their cars in the parking lot. While claiming to uphold “individual” rights, Musk in reality acts as though workers at his plants have *no* rights, certainly not the right to a healthy and safe working environment, as shown by the premature reopening of the Fremont plant in 2020, in defiance of public health orders, resulting in hundreds and hundreds of workers getting sick from COVID.

I would say that if you read my program and agree that workers need to

organize ourselves in order to take power back from the pro-corporate UAW apparatus, and fight for demands based on our common class interests, then you should speak to your coworkers about my campaign, share my statements with them and find a time we could meet and have a group discussion online. I could also schedule a call with you sometime soon if you're interested, or with one of the volunteers for my campaign in your area.

Best,  
Will  
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Many workers wrote to Will in response to a UAW official calling GM security on Will Lehman in August, an act of intimidation against workers aimed at violating their free speech rights.

A GM worker from Fort Wayne, Indiana writes:

*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!*

B

Hello B,

Thank you for your support. Where do you work? Where did your grandfather work? No, the UAW is not the organization that our fathers and grandfathers built. It was highly revealing that the UAW called GM security on us in Flint of all places, which was the center of the Sit-Down Strike Wave of 1936-37. The UAW has become just a union in name only. It functions as an arm of corporate management.

This transformation can't be explained by the presence of a few corrupt leaders. The UAW strategy is based on nationalism. During the decades of globalization, the UAW collaborated with the "American" companies to lower costs by slashing our wages and shutting down plants that employed millions of autoworkers. They told us that we had to sacrifice to help the US automakers, and they rejected any effort to ally with the working class of other countries. Instead, they put us in a race to the bottom against workers of other countries. As a result, whole communities have been ruined. Look at Flint itself, where workers once had a much higher standard of living but who today don't even have clean water to drink.

I propose a fundamentally different strategy based on internationalism. We are fighting transnational corporations. To win, we need to be allied with workers in all the countries where the companies operate. We don't have any reason to compete with workers in China or Mexico or anywhere else. We have every reason to join with them in a common struggle against our common enemies. This is the international strategy that we need today.

What do you think? And please tell me where you work and what conditions are like at your workplace.

Thank you,  
Will Lehman  
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An Indiana UAW member writes about the incident in Flint:

*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.*

*Our current issue is management removing all apprentices from the apprenticeship program and placing them back on the floor and stripping*

*them of their apprentice pay and saying "since you turned down our solution, this is our next solution." Our chairman has reached out to our international rep for support along with the members that were in the program all filing grievances, and after two weeks there's still no response. I speak with my brother who is a member of the IBEW in Chicago and he can't believe what I tell him and show him. His union and its members are family and function as a union and still practice the "old school" type of union, and they are strong! In my own personal irrelevant opinion 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 in 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. I know times have changed and unions and their members have had to adapt and make many sacrifices in hopes of it getting better, but it's only gotten worse.*

R

Hello R,

I don't think your opinion is irrelevant at all. In fact the issues you are raising are extremely important and expose the role the UAW has come to play everywhere. The corruption ring that led to the prosecution of the leadership was not the product of a few "bad apples." It exposed the rot of the bureaucracy as a whole. Did you know that the UAW International alone spends \$75 million a year on salaries for themselves? There are 450 people at "Solidarity House" who make over \$100,000 a year, all off of our dues money.

Can you tell me a bit more about the plant in Speedway? How many people work there? What about starting a rank-and-file committee at your plant to address the apprentice issue? If your local won't help you, you must help yourselves. That's what my campaign is all about. I don't think that changing a few people at the top is going to do anything. We the workers need to take power into our hands. This means setting up our own organizations to talk about what we want, not what the company says they need. This sounds like the way to address the apprentice issue at your plant. Everyone knows grievances go straight in the trash can.

What do you think about this? I can help you and your coworkers out in setting up a committee of your own. If you set up a meeting or phone call of your coworkers I would be happy to join and share my thoughts.

Let me know,  
Will Lehman

P.S.: Yes, the incident in Flint was revealing. The UAW called the company and started intimidating workers out of exercising their free speech rights. This is emblematic of how the UAW views the workers it "represents." They think we are just slaves with no rights at all.

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Watch David North's remarks commemorating 25 years of the *World Socialist Web Site* and donate today.

A UAW member and university employee writes:

*Hi Will. I am a UAW member from Ohio. All I hear from most of the candidates is them talking about plants and manufacturing. None of the UAW members in my local work in manufacturing. We either work at a college or we work in an office. I have asked this question to a lot of candidates. Why should our members vote for you?*

J

Hi J,

As it turns out, I issued a letter addressed to university employees on Tuesday which speaks to your question. My campaign is aimed at developing a movement which unites the entire working class around our common interests, including to a good-paying job, a secure retirement, a healthy and safe workplace, and more.

As I put it in the letter, “Whether we work in auto plants or classrooms, we all confront the impact of decades of pro-corporate betrayals by the UAW bureaucracy. As we face more and more hardship, corporate profits grow, university endowments increase, and the corporate and union executives get richer and richer.” All workers are facing a surging cost of living, while the wage increases in the contracts pushed through by the UAW bureaucracy are far below inflation.

None of these problems can be resolved at a single workplace, company, or university campus. I’m running for UAW president in order to encourage a rebellion from below and for workers to organize themselves in rank-and-file committees, whether at factories or other workplaces, which would allow us to coordinate our struggles on a much larger scale, even internationally.

Let me know what you think of the points I make in the letter. Would you also be interested in scheduling a time for me to speak with you and your coworkers?

Best,

Will

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An autoworker from Pontiac, Michigan writes:

*I myself am tired of poor leadership at the local and international levels. I do not agree with international donating millions of dollars to political parties, mainly the one hell bent on destroying America (aka the current administration). Our local leaders just sit in an office and are only seen when there is an issue. They successfully bid on jobs with the highest level of pay, and then don't do the job because they are union reps, etc. I feel as if they should be doing their production job as well as taking care of union business. Also I am in “right to work state” and instead of trying to recruit more members, they shun non members. Instead of asking employees to do their job, our leaders seem to protect the lazy while most of us do our job. This makes more members leave the union, giving the union a terrible image. How will you address these issues? Are you sure you can tackle changing the international system of corruption?*

R

Hello R,

As I said in my initial campaign statement, change will only take place to the extent that we organize our independent strength through the formation of rank-and-file committees composed of and controlled by workers. I am specifically not campaigning on the notion of being elected and I alone can reform everything. I’ll leave that assertion to the other candidates running. I want workers that agree with the program of my campaign to begin building these committees.

This requires workers to take action and begin building. It will not be easy but many workers will begin coming to the same conclusions that I have. Conditions are continually worsening for all of us and small measures will not bring about positive change, especially no lasting change. That is why I’m turning to the workers to help bring changes about. I am certain that if workers follow the points I’m laying out that we absolutely will bring about the changes required, but it depends on worker participation for that to happen.

Please share the messages coming from my campaign with the workers you know are willing to fight and participate in the building of a rank-and-file committee. Form a committee where you work and begin recruiting workers to it. I can help you do so, but ultimately it will be up to your actions as well. If you are committed to building a committee, please don’t hesitate to ask any questions as to how to go about doing so.

Thank you,

Will Lehman

*For more information on Will Lehman’s campaign, visit [WillforUAWPresident.org](http://WillforUAWPresident.org).*



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**