

Workers react to Will Lehman campaign after historic UAW presidential debate

Our reporter
23 September 2022

Following the historic debate Thursday night between candidates for the presidency of the United Auto Workers, many workers have reached out to the World Socialist Web Site to give their reaction.

The debate featured socialist Will Lehman, a tiered worker at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and candidates representing the UAW bureaucracy, including incumbent UAW President Ray Curry, longtime UAW bureaucrat Shawn Fain and Local 163 Shop Chairman Mark Gibson from Detroit Diesel. Brian Keller, a Detroit area autoworker, is also running.

Lehman sharply differentiated himself both from Curry and his open defense of the hated bureaucracy, and from those like Fain and Keller, who advanced the idea that the UAW bureaucracy could be reformed. Instead Lehman called for the abolition of the bureaucracy and for giving power to rank-and-file workers.

A worker at the Stellantis Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit who watched the debate said, “Curry and Fain were selling the same old thing, we know what you need. They haven’t been on a factory floor in so long they don’t have a clue.

“He [Will] did very well because he told the truth about what’s really going on the factory floor and how the reps don’t care. The International is a house of cards, it doesn’t take much to expose the lies. It’s hard to believe they think the lies will be believed”

Lehman pointed out that the only reason workers were being allowed to vote was due to the massive corruption scandal that has sent two former UAW presidents to prison, as well as numerous other top officials. “This isn’t a question of a few bad individuals but of the bureaucracy as a whole. The UAW bureaucracy is a part of management,” Lehman declared.

In his closing remarks Lehman made a powerful case for the need to build a rank-and-file movement guided by the principles of socialism and internationalism. The

entire working class has the power to change things, but we must take power ourselves.

“We must build rank-and-file committees in our workplaces to link up with one another and form an alternate power structure to fight for what we need. We must link our struggles with autoworkers in Mexico, in Canada and across the world. We must fight alongside rail workers, teachers, nurses, steel workers and longshoremen—all sections of the working class exploited by the same network of corporations, who control both political parties and run the government under capitalism.”

A worker from Ford Chicago Assembly said, “I was laughing out loud at the candidates that were trying so hard to seem genuine yet have been screwing the workers over for decades. They kept talking about how they’ve supported the workers and yet we keep losing every single contract.

“Will’s points are good. But these other [expletives] are very smooth talkers.”

A Stellantis Belvidere Assembly worker remarked, “I have rarely seen such an unprofessional debate. Will was the only one who remained on topic. The others were bragging—and not a word on worker safety.”

A veteran worker at the Stellantis Jeep complex in Toledo, Ohio said, “Everything needs to be out in the open, they are hiding things. I understand what Will is trying to say, the bureaucracy should be gone and there should be transparency.

“Out of everyone there, he was the most intelligent guy.

“The corruption is terrible. That Fain character is a crook, the guy in there now is a crook. The biggest thing I have for Will, is that he is two-tier. We need to go back to where there is solidarity, pensions for everybody—equality. My son is a second-tier. We have more people that are second-tier at our plant than at the traditional wage, and I don’t know how many TPTs.

There is separation.”

The worker said that to be viable, rank-and-file committees would have to work together. “We still need an international agreement, there would have to be delegates from every factory.”

Will sharply differentiated himself from the other candidates by his stress on the need for the international unity of the working class, declaring during the debate, “With an international rank-and-file strategy we can unleash the power of the working class and change the course of history.”

In response to Will Lehman, both Shawn Fain and Ray Curry cynically tried to present the UAW’s collaboration with the so-called international union IndustriAll as representing international solidarity. In reality IndustriAll is an arm of the US government in alliance with other capitalist governments aimed at suppressing the struggles of workers and ensuring low wages and a stable labor environment for transnational corporations.

A retired General Motors worker responding to the debate said, “I think Will did a good job at the debate. Especially he made the point of how important the unions must organize internationally, because the companies are international. If he doesn’t win this election it looks like the other four are more or less same old same old.”

A Jeep worker added, “I heard what [Will] said about talking to everybody in Canada, Mexico, Italy, everywhere, and getting people together. I believe we should have medical for all, pensions for all. We should all be working together.

“There needs to be a big network across the world to have it run right. Work together and stand together, everyone would get their fair share. Capitalism is a bureaucracy, 100 percent, the rich get rich and the poor get poorer. You have someone out there breaking his ass for you, and you pay them peanuts until they die.”



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