

“We’re on the same page as Will”: Detroit autoworkers back Will Lehman for UAW president

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The WSWS has endorsed Will Lehman for UAW president. For more on Lehman’s campaign, visit WillforUAWpresident.org.

Supporters of Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist, visited the Detroit Assembly Complex - Mack in Detroit last week and spoke to workers about his campaign for president of the United Auto Workers union. Nearly 5,000 hourly workers build Jeep Grand Cherokees at the giant Stellantis (Chrysler) plant, which began operation in March 2021.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to Mack Assembly workers before and after the debate of UAW presidential candidates last Thursday. In the debate, Will Lehman spoke on behalf of the interests of rank-and-file workers against incumbent UAW President Ray Curry and three other candidates, who, in one way or another, defended the UAW apparatus.

“Everybody on my line watched the debate and was talking about it,” a worker with more than two decades at Stellantis, formerly Fiat Chrysler, told the WSWS. “Will made good points. The other candidates said Will is inexperienced, but he sounded like the most experienced one in the debate.

“Some of the workers are conflicted about voting for Will or Brian Keller. But everybody honed in on Keller’s nationalism, when Will said we all work for multi-national companies and need to unite around the world to fight them.

“Workers want to know more about these rank-and-file committees. They can’t see yet how we can organize on the shop floor because it’s hard to get around the UAW Local 51 officials. But Will is starting something, and we’re on the same page with him. He wants to get workers on the floor going on the right

path.

“It’s a year before the contract expires and the UAW officials in the plant are already saying we’re not going to get COLA back. Why not? Inflation is 9 percent. We’re fed up. When I hired in it took 90 days to get rolled over to full time and two years to earn the top pay. Now you can be a temp or a second-tier worker for years.

“Over the last two decades the industry has changed and so has the UAW. I worked at the old Mack Engine, plant, Warren Truck, Sterling Heights and other plants. It’s gone from good to worse very fast. We get the same old path and rhetoric from the UAW.

“In 2008-09, they outsourced the janitorial work. That was done by Nate Gooden. Then General Holifield introduced the A, B, C crews and 10 hour days, and got rid of COLA. They’ve been cheating us out of the money we lost when they were taking bribes from the company. It used to be time and a half after eight hours and that was changed to after 40 hours a week. We never had weekend work, but now they’ve taken us away from our families by forcing us to work on Saturdays. They’ve hired more TPTs instead of full-time workers and they are making a killing off us. We’re sacrificing our bodies and they won’t pay.

“The union doesn’t give any information to us on the shop floor; you barely ever see a steward. They won’t file grievances and ride around with management like their friends. They do more for management than they do for workers.

“The company is making too much money to treat us like that. Our co-workers passed away from COVID or got sick. They forced us to sacrifice. Now is the time for us to walk off and shut them down, that’s what it’s

coming to. All workers, the railroad workers, the nurses and teachers, we should shut everything down. I used to go to the training center, and we could talk to Canadian workers, and the company and the union stopped that. All of us are brothers and sisters and we can't let the companies make us fight each other.

"Everybody was talking about Will's campaign after his supporters came to the plant. Everybody read his fliers. We don't want to be divided between tiers, part-time and full-time, we want to unite everybody against this."

Another worker said, 'We like what Will is saying. He's speaking to the younger folks, the more experienced and the retirees—to all of us. I love the statement he made when he said, 'I cannot do this by myself. It is up to the workers on the shop floor to fight.' Things have to change. The union is not fighting for us."

A young worker who was a TPT (temporary part time) for three years before being full time said, "They treat us like slaves. That's why so many new hires are leaving. They're taking people off the line and make them managers or shop stewards, but they don't do anything. And this is a multi-billion-dollar company.

"The union has got us all divided. But in March 2020, workers at SHAP [Sterling Heights Assembly], JNAP [Jefferson North Assembly] and other plants came together, and workers shut the plants down because of COVID. The UAW didn't give a damn if we got sick or died, they just wanted us to come in and build trucks.

"The work rules were set up here when it used to be mostly men in the factories. Now you have thousands of women, but they don't make any accommodation for us when we have to stay home if our kids are sick. We shouldn't get in trouble or penalized. Instead, we should get time off. There should also be child care centers in the factories, like I've seen for health care workers.

"But they don't care, and they are ready to walk you out if you miss work. The UAW and HR officials can work remotely from home, but we have to be in there building trucks no matter. They treat us like numbers. If you get sick or die, they just get another number to fill in.

"Why pay dues if you don't have any union representation? The union reps are always kissing

management's butts. If anything happens, you're out of here."

The worker said he had been following the contract struggle on the railroads, where the unions recently agreed to a deal that met none of workers' demands in order to avert a potential strike.

"If the railroad workers go on strike, nothing is going to move. Without us, the company can't build trucks. It doesn't matter what color you are, we are all workers and have the same fight."

"I am definitely down with the whole agenda that Will is fighting for," said Doug. "I was involved in the Detroit newspaper strike in the 1990s that lasted for five years. People fought and died for the 40-hour workweek, to get children out of the factories, but things have been going backwards for years. The UAW is in bed with management, and it's in your face. They force you to work weekends. I do my job competently in 40 hours and I don't want the company to eat my free time. The union officials say we're powerless, but that's a lie. Without us the company has no production, no vehicles coming off the line. Without our labor they have no profits.

"Will has it right. The UAW has been stealing from us for years. We have to build power on the shop floor. My great grandparents were coal miners in Scotland who had to come here. I grew up hearing about Eugene Debs, the socialist and railroad workers leader. I've seen a photo of my grandfather, who is literally bent in half because of stooping in the coal mine for years. They want us to work until we die.

"It's 100 percent time for us to fight and prepare for a strike. The union tries to keep the workers tied and bound. They push through contracts and promise, 'next time, we'll do better,' but it never happens. That's why I'm backing Will."



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