

“I know Will, he’s the people’s champion”

Campaigners for UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman win support from autoworkers in three states

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Supporters of Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker running for United Auto Workers president, visited auto plants in Michigan, Illinois and Ohio over the last several days. Ballots are set to be mailed out October 17 in the first direct membership election of top UAW officers.

Lehman is calling for the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace to spearhead the fight for real gains after decades of concessions engineered by the corrupt UAW apparatus. He has placed the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy and the empowerment of rank-and-file workers at the center of his campaign. Lehman’s program includes a 50 percent wage increase, the abolition of tiers and the hiring of all part-time workers as full-timers.

The socialist candidate for UAW president has also insisted that UAW members must unite with other workers throughout the US and internationally in a common fight to achieve their goals, pointing out that whether they are German, Mexican or Canadian, workers are employed by the same transnational corporations.

At the Stellantis Toledo North Assembly complex, where workers build the Jeep Wrangler and Gladiator, supporters of Will Lehman spoke to workers at the afternoon shift change on Saturday and distributed hundreds of copies of Lehman’s campaign flyer. Several part-time “supplemental employees” told campaigners that they have been stuck in this inferior status, with no job protection, pensions and other benefits, for five and six years.

One worker said he had read Will’s demands, and while agreeing with them, felt it would be difficult to achieve a 50 percent pay increase and triple time when the company forced workers to work overtime. The campaigner explained that nothing workers ever won was achieved without a determined, collective struggle, and that Lehman was fighting to build a powerful rank-and-file movement to win these and other critical demands. If the UAW had not given

up annual wage improvements and cost-of-living adjustments, he said, autoworkers would be making more than \$65 an hour today.

When the worker asked, “Wouldn’t the companies just shut their doors and move production to a lower-cost country?” the campaigner explained that is why Will was fighting to unite American workers with workers across the world “to stop the competition the corporations and the unions imposed on us to see who will work for the worst wages and conditions.” He pointed to the heroic stand of GM workers in at the company’s Silao, Mexico plant who refused to accept speedup and forced overtime during the strike of 48,000 US GM workers in 2019. “The workers want to unite across national boundaries but that means a fight against the nationalism of the UAW apparatus,” he said.

Another Jeep worker told campaign supporters she liked everything Will said, but that she was planning to vote for Stellantis autoworker Brian Keller because she didn’t think it was possible for workers to be able to get everything Will is calling for. She also said that she thought that the only way to get better wages would be to take over the current UAW structure.

When a campaign team member explained that to wage an effective fight, autoworkers needed an international strategy, she agreed, acknowledging that the auto companies are global. The worker said she understood that Keller’s nationalist program would not be effective in uniting workers internationally and she said she would read about Will’s campaign and reconsider.

A team of Will Lehman’s supporters also visited Ford’s Chicago Assembly Plant (CAP) last week to speak to workers about Lehman’s campaign.

A CAP worker who started six years ago at the plant explained why she was interested in Will’s program. “We

had COLA, we had pension, which we don't have anymore. And the cost of living is very high now. One person can't live by themselves off the income that we have. If one bedroom is \$1,000-\$1,200 in Chicago and if your paycheck is way less than that, it's a problem. COLA is very important; we need to adjust for cost of living.

"I would say that starting we should be making \$35. We've been so conditioned to believe that we should take less. At this point in time, we can't even afford the cars we make. You want me to buy Ford, but I can't afford the car I make? That's a problem.

"We used to have more. Now we get less and less. The UAW, they can do more for us, but they don't. Our bargaining is not as good as it should be on the floor. There are a lot of us on the floor getting in trouble, because they're not enforcing the policy or protocol. Management gets away with a lot of stuff. If you follow the protocols, you get punished."

At the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit, campaigners spoke with workers at the early morning shift change. Many workers were unaware of the UAW presidential election because the UAW bureaucracy has kept workers in the dark in order to suppress the vote. Several workers, however, knew about Lehman. One young worker on the midnight shift came out the plant saying, "I know Will, he's the people's champion. I'm voting for him."

Others were also very concerned about the threats to jobs of workers at the nearby Warren Truck Assembly plant, with top Stellantis executives and UAW officials saying the third shift would be eliminated and the plant potentially closed if workers did not improve "quality" and lower absenteeism rates.

Campaigners explained that Lehman is fighting to mobilize workers to defend all jobs, in the US and internationally, and oppose the efforts of the global automakers to pit workers against each other.

Supporters of Will Lehman also spoke to workers during a shift change at the new Ultium Cells battery plant in Warren, Ohio. The operation is a partnership of General Motors and LG Energy Solution. The plant, that opened in August, currently employs 800 workers who will build batteries for GM's electric Hummer and SUV built at Factory Zero in Detroit.

The plant was built adjacent to the former General Motors Lordstown Assembly plant, which was closed in 2019 after the betrayal of the GM strike by the UAW, throwing 3,500 workers out of work.

The Ultium Cells plant is currently nonunion; however, the UAW reports that up to 90 percent of the workers have signed cards for union representation. GM has reportedly

agreed to a card count to determine UAW representation.

Workers at the plant were eager to find out about Lehman's campaign, stopping their cars to talk with campaigners and take materials. Many workers took extra flyers to give to coworkers the next day.

Most workers did not know that an election was taking place but were eager to hear about Lehman's platform and to discuss conditions inside the plant. What they reported is a chilling example of what the global automakers intend to impose, with the assistance of the UAW, on all workers in electric vehicle and component production.

"I feel like we have no rights in here," one worker told campaigners. "We have no choices. It is just do what they say to do or you can get walked out, that's it. The shifts, they change the time on you every other week, whenever they want, and if you don't like it, they will fire you. It is just outrageous; we have no say-so."

"It is a startup company. We make \$16.50 but being that we deal with dangerous chemicals, I think we should be making more," she concluded.

Another worker pointed out that management has no respect for the employees. "Conditions in the plant are good. Everything is new. What I don't like is the way that they (management) talk to you. The way that they treat you like you are nothing."

"They just tell us anything, they can change our shifts, move us to different jobs. Whatever they say we have to do. They don't treat us with any respect. The team leads are not picked by what they know, but they are just somebody's friend or relative."

Another worker pointed out that since he started working, he has not worked the same shift for more than two weeks. "They are constantly changing your shift. You can't plan your life around that. Many people have to have child care or someone to watch their children after school and you don't know what time you will be getting home from day to day."



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