

Supporters of Will Lehman speak to Ford workers in Ohio and Michigan

Our reporters

13 October 2022

Supporters of Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker running for president of the United Auto Workers union, spoke to Ford workers in Michigan and Ohio in recent days.

On Tuesday, campaign supporters visited Ford Ohio Assembly (OAP) in Avon Lake outside Cleveland, which employs 1,600 hourly workers building the Ford E Series and Super Duty light trucks. Like other Ford plants, production has been hampered by periodic shortages of parts.

In early 2021, Ford announced it was cancelling plans for the expansion of OAP that it had previously claimed would bring 1,500 new jobs to the plant. The UAW did nothing to oppose the cancellation, despite the fact that the pledge by Ford to bring new jobs to the plant had been used by the union to push the concessionary 2019 national auto agreement

The campaign team received a warm response from OAP workers and distributed hundreds of campaign flyers. A number of workers said they had transferred to OAP after their plants closed.

Workers without exception said they wanted to eliminate the tiers and ridiculed the claim of UAW President Ray Curry that tiers had been eliminated in previous contract negotiations.

A Ohio Assembly worker said he started in 2012 as a temp, but did not get hired full time until 2015 and only this year was promoted to top rate. Many other workers expressed anger over the tiers. One woman complained that recent hires had no pension and only get a 401k that they have to put money into themselves.

Another worker told campaign supporters, “I am a tier worker. We really got sold out in the last contract. We are really suffering.”

A veteran worker said, “Tiers are terrible, they have got everyone divided up. I have got four more years

until retirement. I am afraid they are going to take pensions from the traditional workers,” he said, expressing concern that the UAW would pit the lower tiers against the veteran workers to strip benefits from retirees.

He added, “The international has cost of living on their pensions, but we don’t even have it.”

Another worker pointed out, “We need to get rid of tiers and bring back COLA. They are eliminating jobs. Honestly, we’ve got people doing four to five people’s work and the union is not doing anything about it.”

When a campaign team member explained to a worker that Will Lehman was fighting to put the rank and file in power, abolish the UAW bureaucracy and win back cost of living and pensions and end tiered work, another worker said, “I agree that’s what we need. We need our own control over contracts.”

Two workers, one with 10 years the other with 18, stopped to talk when a campaign supporter explained there was a socialist running for UAW president. “They have given away everything,” he said, referring to the UAW. “At first I thought you were with the union and I was going to tell you what I feel,” he said, adding, “We need rank-and-file control.”

One worker told a campaign supporter, “Thank you for coming all the way here to tell us about this. No-one else has been talking to us about this election.”

Another worker said, “All the unions have done for us since I got here eight years ago is give away concessions in our contract renewals.”

Supporters of Will’s campaign also leafleted the afternoon shift change at the Ford Cleveland Engine Plant, where workers were eager to learn about the campaign.

An engine plant worker said she had been laid off for 17 years and called back only a few years ago. She was

on tier 1, but said there were a lot of people in the plant on tier 2. She was furious how long it takes tier-two workers to be brought to top pay.

The campaign also spoke with Ford workers in Dearborn, Michigan. A supporter of Will Lehman from the Ford Dearborn Truck Plant (DTP), just west of Detroit, where the new electric pick-up trucks will be produced, reported that many workers in the plant are talking about Will's campaign. They are discussing the various candidates in the election and recognize that Will is the only candidate who is against the whole system.

She said that the shop chairman at DTP had recently boasted about the fact that his son was promoted by UAW President Ray Curry from the Ford Flat Rock plant to the International union. This was an obvious attempt by the incumbent Curry, she said, to buy votes in one of the largest locals in the union. The shop chairman posted news of his son's promotion on the local union Facebook page as if there was nothing improper with such a blatant political payoff in the run up to the election.

"Originally he seemed like a radical without a plan," the Dearborn Truck worker said, referring to Will. "But he does have a plan. You just have to think about it to understand it." She went on to explain that rank and file workers have to build a network of committees to take control of negotiating contracts and protecting their fellow workers within the plants.

"This is the first election we have ever had. Naturally, the Curry 'Solidarity' team is being pushed by the union. But a lot of people want anything but Curry. And they see Will as an alternative to the current system."

She went on to explain the impact of four decades of concessions contracts that culminated in the corruption scandal, which engulfed the entire UAW apparatus, has had on the thinking of many workers.

"I lost faith in the union four years ago. I used to go to every union meeting and participate wherever I could. But I have seen that the chairman at DTP does whatever the plant manager tells him to do. And if he doesn't the International comes down and tells him he has to do what they say.

"People are getting fired for reasons that are not their fault. Very often they don't even have the proper training and they get fired for something they do not

understand. We have been lied to and stolen from and all that."



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact