

“They must be running scared”: UAW officials tell Ford management to remove Will Lehman campaigners at Kansas City assembly plant

Dominic Gustavo
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Supporters of the campaign of Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) were removed yesterday from the premises of the Ford assembly plant in Kansas City, Missouri, after local UAW officials complained to Ford management.

Lehman’s supporters were campaigning at the plant, distributing material and speaking with workers who were entering and leaving the facility. The campaigners worked in plain sight of Ford security, which did not intervene as hundreds of leaflets were passed out. Lehman’s team also collected photographs and video statements of workers expressing their support for the campaign.

Several workers gave lengthy statements, expressing their anger and frustration over the exploitative conditions they face and the corruption and impotence of their official union representatives.

Kevin said, “The UAW gave up our cost of living, pensions and we’ve got to pay a lot more for our medical insurance. The company complains about quality and productivity, but you got hundreds of workers here making the same money as they can get at Target. A lot of the TPTs [temporary part-time workers] quit because they can get more somewhere else and not put up with the abuse.

“It’s a great idea that your candidate [Will Lehman] has about workers on the shop floor having the power. My dad worked here 40 years, and he was old school when it came to the union fighting. But they stopped fighting a long time ago. The local president here, Jason Starr, kissed ass and got a promotion to the UAW International.”

“I’ve lost 23.8 percent of my 401(k). How is that guaranteeing me a pension?” said Peter, a veteran worker. “The UAW has given up so much stuff, and what are we getting out of it? We’re not guaranteed our jobs anymore. We have to step up.”

Asked what he thought about Will’s call for the transfer of power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor, Peter said, “I thought that’s where it was supposed to be anyway. But it has changed over the years, and I hope [Will] is correct and we can get it done. It needs to be done because we’re the ones who are in here making them the money. We ought to be the ones who have say-so, instead of the higher-ups having the say-so.”

“You’ve got to make it equal for everybody so they have the same rights,” Peter said, “the same pay, the same dignity as the guy next to you.”

After nearly an hour, a company security guard approached Lehman’s supporters and informed them that he had been instructed by the plant manager to have them removed. Lehman’s supporters explained that they were involved in a union election, which was being overseen by a federal Monitor who had mandated that all candidates have equal opportunity to present their views to workers.

The security guard said he had been instructed by two local UAW officials to ascertain whether Lehman’s supporters were Ford employees, and if they were not, to order them to leave because they were trespassing. When asked who these officials were, the security guard turned around and said they had disappeared.

The guard said UAW officials had spoken to Ford

management about removing the campaigners, a clear violation of democratic procedures. Lehman is an official candidate for the UAW presidency, and the UAW is obligated to allow his supporters the same ability to campaign among autoworkers as any other candidate.

Lehman has openly called for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy and the transfer of power to the rank-and-file on the shop floor. He has encouraged workers to form election committees to resist the efforts of the union apparatus to suppress the vote.

Forced to leave the factory grounds, Lehman's supporters moved to the facility entrance, where they handed out leaflets to workers driving to and from the plant. After some time, they were again approached by Ford security, soon joined by Kansas City police, who declared that they either leave or face arrest for trespassing.

After being expelled, Lehman's team contacted several of the workers they had spoken to at the factory about their thoughts on the UAW having them removed.

One veteran worker said, "They must be running scared." Another reacted by saying, "Wow, doesn't shine a good light on the people across the street at the union hall." He said he would circulate pictures of the campaign fliers on Facebook, adding, "They can't silence everybody. There are too many of us."

The collusion of the UAW bureaucrats with Ford management to suppress the campaign of Will Lehman is an attack on the democratic rights of workers. It also reflects the extreme nervousness in the ranks of the UAW bureaucracy, who are terrified of the powerful response that Lehman's campaign is producing among rank-and-file workers.

The following day, UAW Local 31 officials tried the same tactics at the General Motors Kansas City Fairfax Assembly Plant.

Campaigners received powerful support from rank-and-file workers livid over the UAW bureaucracy's collusion with management, which has eliminated skilled trade positions, undermined safety, imposed long hours of mandatory overtime and forced younger workers to labor for poverty level wages.

From behind a chain link fence, one local official with a patch identifying her as a member of the UAW Local 31 Benefits Committee said she was calling

security to have the campaigners removed. Another, who identified himself as a "UAW rep," said campaigners had to "get clearance from the hall to present this to our members on company property."

The officials backed off as campaigners videoed their actions and challenged the efforts to interfere in the election and prevent workers from hearing about a candidate challenging Ray Curry and the UAW apparatus. Seeing the widespread support campaigners received from workers, the UAW officials scampered away and management took no action.

These were not the first times that UAW officials have employed intimidation tactics to block Lehman's campaign from reaching workers. On September 1, Lehman sent a letter to the court appointed monitor overseeing the UAW election, demanding that it launch an investigation into an incident in which a UAW official at the Flint General Motors (GM) assembly plant threatened to have Lehman and his team removed.

The letter stated, "This is an overt act of intimidation against workers who became fearful that they would be retaliated against at work for even speaking to me or taking a leaflet. This act is representative of the type of behavior rank-and-file workers have been forced to accept for years, in which the UAW has bullied and intimidated us while accepting bribes from the corporations behind our backs."

The Lehman campaign has received no response from the Monitor as to the results of its investigation.



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