

Momentum builds for Will Lehman's campaign at GM Fairfax and Wentzville plants

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On Sunday, October 23, at 2:00 p.m. EDT, UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman is hosting an emergency public meeting to discuss a strategy to defend jobs. Register here. For more information on the campaign, visit WillForUAWPresident.org.

Momentum continues to build for the campaign of rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman for president of the United Auto Workers at auto plants throughout the Midwest. On Thursday, a leading member of the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee joined a campaign for Lehman at the General Motors Fairfax Kansas City Assembly Plant during the afternoon shift change.

For months, more than 115,000 railroad workers have been pressing for strike action to defend their living standards against runaway inflation and punitive attendance policies that compel workers to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee was formed to counter the efforts of the rail unions apparatus and the Biden administration to illegalize strike action and impose the dictates of the corporations.

Campaigners distributed hundreds of flyers explaining what the second-tier Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president is fighting for. Mark, the rail worker, explained he was supporting Lehman's fight to transfer power from the union apparatus to rank-and-file workers because this was the only way that workers could exercise their collective strength.

"Like the railroad workers, we never get time off for our families," Gary, a veteran skilled trades worker, told campaigners. "Every week, I go up to the country to go camping with my wife. I take my camper up there with her on Fridays but then I get a last-minute call ordering me to report to work Saturday. My wife says she's a 'camping widow.'"

Mark asked, "It's pretty much the same, you are working holidays, working extra shifts, and forced to work mandatory overtime. What is eight hours?"

The GM worker replied, "Right now, it's 12 hours. Down in final assembly we're working six and seven days a week, 12 hours a day."

The rail worker asked, "Are they still hiring? It must be high turnover."

The GM worker replied, "We've had people come to work and they walk out at the first break or lunch. It's unbelievable."

"We're seeing the same thing in the railroad too," Mark replied.

Gary described the conditions of new workers. "A couple of people who got hired worked six years before they got them on full time. Then it takes more time to reach top pay. So how many years does it take to get good pay? When I hired on, it took 90 days to get full time and pay too, so it wasn't bad. But now, I don't know how they can make a living starting out making that pay."

The two then discussed how the UAW had agreed to the two-tier wage system and why it was up to workers to fight it. Like Lehman's call for the building of rank-and-file committees in the auto factories, rail workers have organized independently of the union apparatus, communicating with each other, spreading essential information, and coordinating action.

"We are trying to build a rank-and-file committee in the railroad," Mark said. "We've been holding informational pickets to try to get out more information about the rank and file. This has been a long time coming in the railroads. The unions have let us down and we are trying to bring the power back to the people."

In a discussion with another worker, Mark said, "We are for abolishing the corruption of the union, and it's

been a long time coming.” The worker responded, “Just for saying that, Will’s got my vote.”

Another worker said, “Job cuts are already coming. They eliminated the job of the third-shift guy at the store, where we pick up our gloves, sleeves and other protective equipment. There also is no more third-shift medical staff. I guess you better not get sick or hurt on the third shift. They’re also starting to eliminate skilled trades on the third shift. All of this happened after the strike in 2019. I hear what Will is saying about the rank and file having power, but it is going to be a hard fight.”

Campaigners spoke to several younger second-tier workers who are being paid half the wages of senior workers, along with workers stuck in temporary status. “I came in on second-tier and its sucks,” one worker said.

At one point during the campaign, several UAW officials insisted that the railroad worker and other Lehman campaigners leave because the factory gate was “company property.” A UAW official who identified himself as the UAW Local 31 plant chairman tried to defend the incumbent UAW president, Ray Curry, claiming that Lehman’s program to abolish the UAW apparatus was unreasonable and unworkable.

The rail worker asked the plant chairman why the two-tier wage system was still in the plants. The chairman, who was wearing a “Curry Team” button, replied feebly, “We went through bankruptcy. You can’t just change things overnight. You have to do it at the bargaining table.”

In fact, the UAW bureaucracy opposed any fight against the bankruptcy restructuring of GM and Chrysler engineered by the Wall Street asset strippers on President Obama’s Auto Task Force. Even after the companies returned to profitability, the UAW pushed through deals, which sanctioned the hated two-tier system and the expansion of temporary work. This includes contracts in 2011, 2015 and after the 2019 GM strike, which were signed by UAW officials who took bribes from the auto bosses and embezzled millions in union dues.

The former Missouri-based UAW Region 5 was the center of the theft of union assets, which landed former UAW president Dennis William, Gary Jones and regional director Vance Peterson in federal penitentiaries.

From Kansas City, Lehman campaigners traveled to the GM Wentzville truck assembly plant near St. Louis, Missouri. Once again, they received a powerful response from workers.

“It would be great to make more than McDonald’s wages here,” one young worker told campaigners, adding

that UAW Local 2250 officials had been implicated for misusing union dues to take cruises. “The FBI went to the union hall, and they were not caught until the big investigation into UAW corruption broke.”

Another held up an election ballot and said, “I am voting for Will Lehman so we can get rid of Curry and all his people who have been in there forever and were stealing our money. We need new, young people in there.”

Another worker said, “I saw the debate between the UAW presidential candidates, and I liked Will the best. He’s talking about reducing the workweek to four days, with no loss of pay, to protect jobs. He’s also talking about a worldwide fight, including uniting with the Mexican workers. I’ve watched their strikes on YouTube and they really fight. There is more power in numbers if we unite around the world.

“I’m sick of these union officials who use our money to go off to these conventions and other trips. The biggest problem we have in our plant is job overloading. We feel like hamsters on a wheel. Until recently they were making us work six and seven days a week. We were supposed to be scheduled to work two Saturdays in a row and get one Saturday off. But if they run out of parts, they cancel one Saturday and then schedule you on one that you’re supposed to have off. How can you have any family life like that?”

Told that a railroad worker had campaigned in Kansas City for Will Lehman, she said, “The railroad workers are really getting worn out and they want to strike. We all need to fight together.”



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