

Will Lehman campaign holds meeting to oppose layoffs as election enters final stages

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Over 100 workers and supporters attended an online meeting held Sunday by the campaign of Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW). The meeting was held to rally autoworkers against the wave of plant closures and layoffs being carried out by the auto corporations with the assistance of the UAW bureaucracy.

In his opening remarks, Lehman stated: “We’re holding this meeting today because our jobs and livelihoods are under attack. The corporations are once again attempting to restructure the global auto industry at the expense of workers.”

He continued, “We cannot allow our jobs to be destroyed for corporate profit. I’m running for UAW president in order to organize the mass movement of workers to stop the corporate attacks and secure our interests. That’s why I’m calling for workers to form rank-and-file factory committees, so that we can transfer power to the shop floor and abolish the UAW apparatus that blocks us from fighting.”

Stellantis recently announced that it was eliminating the third shift at the Chrysler Warren Truck Assembly plant in Detroit, Michigan. The Stellantis Belvidere Jeep plant in Illinois has seen thousands of layoffs and the elimination of two shifts since 2019.

The Ford Romeo Engine Plant north of Detroit, which employs over 1,000 workers, is scheduled to close next year, a result of the sellout agreement negotiated by the UAW in 2019. Other plants, such as Ford Chicago Assembly and Belvidere, are threatened with layoffs and even closures.

This assault on jobs is an international phenomenon, with Ford having shut down plants and laid off workers in Saarlouis, Germany and Chennai, India earlier this year. Stellantis has also announced that it will cut the second shift at the Windsor, Ontario plant in Canada in

June 2023.

In reference to this, Lehman stated that the corporations “claim that there is no money for decent wages and full benefits for all workers, but what they really mean is that they don’t want to give up any of their profits. Ford, GM and Stellantis alone have taken in over \$65 billion in profits since the start of 2020.”

He continued, “The needs of workers must come first, not corporate profit. The corporations do not have a right to close plants and destroy our livelihoods. ... The corrupt UAW bureaucracy has allowed things to get to this point. Every time the companies threaten to close plants, the UAW officials tell us there’s nothing we can do but accept concessions.

“Therefore, my campaign calls for the full mobilization of all rank-and-file workers in the UAW, including preparations for a national strike, in order to halt any further layoffs or concessions.”

Lehman’s call for workers to form rank-and-file committees to fight back against their exploiters encountered a powerful response from those attending.

One worker who is employed at a non-unionized plant in Flint, Michigan, stated that the plant management was neglecting even the most basic sanitary needs of the workers, forcing them to bring their own personal toilet paper, for instance.

Another worker from the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant brought up the issue of worker safety. She recalled an incident in which a worker died after having a seizure and striking his head. The first aid team that arrived 20 minutes later was not properly trained to use a defibrillator: “When this co-worker passed away on the line, people were told to get working!”

She recalled numerous instances in which the forklift she was driving lost power in the middle of a crowded factory, a serious potential hazard.

She continued, “My son comes to me and tells me that he has anxiety when I go to work … he said because I never know if you’re coming home.”

Another worker at the same plant who is diabetic spoke about the lack of COVID-19 precautions.

Many of the workers asked about how they could form rank-and-file committees, even if they work in other industries that are non-unionized. In response to a logger from the Northeast, Lehman stated, “It doesn’t matter what industry you’re in. … If you recognize that the points we’re advancing in this campaign are accurate and are the way forward for society in general, we definitely want you involved. Email in. Let us know your story.”

In reference to a comment from a worker at the CNH plant in Burlington, Iowa, *World Socialist Web Site* Labor Editor Jerry White, who was moderating the discussion, stated: “The CNH workers are not fighting this battle alone. The workers at Warren Truck, at Chicago Assembly, at John Deere, those who are outside of the auto industry and outside of the United States—This is a struggle of the international working class. A strong vote will send a powerful signal that a fight is possible.”

Lehman ended the meeting with a call for the workers attending to support his campaign by donating, speaking to their co-workers about his platform and finally, voting for him.

Workers will have until November 18 to mail in their ballots. If you are a UAW member and have not received your ballot, contact Will’s campaign. For more information and to get involved, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.



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