

“If that is socialism, then that’s what I am for”: Will Lehman’s campaign for UAW president wins growing support across Midwest and Appalachian auto plants

Tim Rivers
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For more information on Will Lehman’s campaign for UAW president, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.

The campaign of Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman for president of the United Auto Workers won growing support at major factories in the Midwest and Appalachian states over the past week. Lehman, a socialist and second-tier worker, is calling for the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor, abolishing the corrupt UAW apparatus and the development of a mass rank-and-file movement to defend jobs, decent living standards and safe working conditions.

Across Freightliner factories near Charlotte, North Carolina; the Volvo Trucks plant in New River Valley in Dublin, Virginia; the massive General Motors plant in Spring Hill, Tennessee; John Deere’s Waterloo plants; the Ford Kansas City Assembly and GM Fairfax plants; and the Stellantis Jeep plant in Belvidere, Illinois, supporters of Lehman’s campaign passed out thousands of fliers last week, with workers asking for bundles to distribute inside their plants.

Workers began voting for the UAW’s national leadership last week, with the elections set to run through November. A court-appointed monitor, established as a result of a sprawling corruption scandal in the UAW, has stated that ballots should be mailed back by November 18, in order to be received by the final election deadline of November 28.

Spring Hill: “I found him on Facebook, and I’ve

been waiting for you guys to show up”

At 5 a.m. before the morning shift change, a GM Spring Hill worker who had transferred from Wentzville, Missouri, told campaigners for Lehman, “I found him on Facebook, and I’ve been waiting for you guys to show up.” He was one of many workers to take a stack of fliers into his plant. “I like what he is talking about. I am going to vote for Will because he sounds like he is going to get things done for us. If that is socialism, then that’s what I am for.”

Built between 1986 and 1990, the Spring Hill plant sits on almost 8 million square feet of production area, with both stamping and assembly operations. Two years ago the company announced it would spend \$2 billion at the plant to build fully electric vehicles, including the luxury Cadillac LYRIQ.

Supporters of Lehman, however, met a flood of young workers who had started out at the poverty pay rate of \$16 an hour. The UAW bureaucracy has worked with the company to divide and subdivide the workforce with multiple tiers and temporary statuses, as well as the use of union and non-union subcontractors inside the plant.

Chris, who works under a separate contract for Ryder inside the plant, said he strongly supports Lehman’s call to abolish the apparatus.

“They used our dues to build a really nice building, with a full-size basketball court, a weight gym and all this other stuff. It’s not coming out of anyone else’s pockets but ours. Did we vote on that and say ‘hey,

yeah we want that'? Absolutely not! In 2019, as Ryder employees, we didn't get strike pay. ... If we are in the same union, they should protect us and take care of us.

"That did not happen. All they do is take our money, and extra money... Our dues are supposed to be \$44 a month, and they were taking \$66 out for months. We were trying to get our money back. They kept saying it was the company. The company kept saying it was the union. Nobody could give us a straight answer, and I still haven't gotten my money back.

"If they hadn't spent this money on this fancy union hall, then if we go on strike they could take that money and have paid us to help support us and our families."

Belvidere: "They are deliberately pushing a lot of higher-seniority, higher-paid people out by driving them beyond their physical limits"

Since 2019, Fiat Chrysler and its successor, Stellantis, has eliminated two shifts and thousands of jobs at the Jeep factory in Belvidere in northern Illinois, reducing the workforce to less than a thousand and raising the specter of the permanent closure of the plant. "The economy is going to hell in a handbasket," a worker with 26 years at Belvidere Assembly told campaigners.

"We have a system of economic slavery. It's not a white and black thing, it's rich and poor. The politicians in Washington, just like in the UAW, see it as a family business. We, workers, scrape by to get money to send our kids to school, and they hand their kids positions of power. I had to move my family from Fenton, Missouri, to keep my job.

"It was horrible. I had to pull my kids out of school, make them leave their friends and move out of our hometown. This has happened to a lot of my union brothers. I hope and pray they're not going to close this plant down now."

In a recent statement and Zoom event calling for a rank-and-file movement to defend jobs and fight concessions, Lehman explained that if the corporations refuse to provide good-paying, safe jobs and a decent livelihood for all workers, then they have forfeited the right to privately own and operate the factories, and should instead be placed under public ownership and

workers' democratic control.

Campaigners for Lehman said they had encountered numerous workers outraged over the dangerous conditions in the plants and the constant economic insecurity they confront.

"There is no union in there," said another Belvidere worker who was forced to retire because he refused to transfer to a plant hundreds of miles away. "The UAW is getting paid off with millions of dollars. Even though I have disabilities and doctors put strict physical limitation on me, the company put me on the master cylinder line where I had to do overhead work."

The UAW bureaucracy refused to defend him after decades of paying union dues, he said, and management wrote him up. "They are deliberately pushing a lot of higher-seniority, higher-paid people out by driving them beyond their physical limits. A worker named Travis Baker died in the plant in August, and there has never been any investigation of how he died, from the coroner, from the UAW or from management. That is a crime. It has to be investigated."



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