

“He’s for the people”: Detroit Stellantis workers explain why they voted for Will Lehman for UAW president

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For more information on the campaign of Will Lehman for UAW president, visit WillForUAWPresident.org.

Workers across the US have begun casting ballots in the first-ever direct membership vote for president of the United Auto Workers union and other executive positions. Ballots have been sent out to over 1 million active and retired UAW members, with the court-appointed UAW Monitor recommending they be mailed back by November 18 to assure they are received before November 28 deadline, the day before counting begins.

Support is growing for Will Lehman, the rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president who is fighting to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shop floor. Lehman is the only candidate calling for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy, which has allowed management to slash wages, divide workers into tiers, and impose exhausting and dangerous working conditions. Lehman is advocating for the formation of rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace to fight to reverse these concessions and mount a struggle against job cuts.

Campaigners for Lehman visited two Stellantis (Chrysler) plants in Warren, just north of Detroit, on Wednesday to discuss the issues in the elections and ask workers who had voted for Lehman why they had done so.

Earlier this month, corporate management, with the collusion of the UAW International and Local 140 leadership, eliminated the third shift at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant, which makes the highly profitable Dodge Ram pickup trucks. While the

company and the union claim this will result in no layoffs, hundreds of workers are being transferred to different shifts or plants, and 1,215 “supplemental” workers will have their hours cut by 50 percent or more, drastically reducing their incomes as the holidays approach.

Campaigners distributed a letter from Will Lehman, titled, “Build rank-and-file power to fight layoffs and concessions!” In it, Lehman said, “If I become UAW International president and the companies seek to carry out mass layoffs and plant closures, then I would call out all workers in the UAW in a national strike with full strike pay, to fight such attacks.”

Despite poor weather and the rush to get in and out of the plant during the afternoon shift change, many workers stopped and spoke with campaigners about why they had voted for Lehman or were planning to.

Caroline, a worker with 25 years, said, “I voted for Will because he stands for what the UAW used to stand for, which is rank and file—not the corporations—for rank and file.” She said it was ridiculous that it took years for part-time workers to be rolled over to full-time status.

The company was blaming workers for high rates of absenteeism and defects when it was the corporate executives who had created such bad conditions in the plant that people were leaving for other jobs, she continued. “You can go to McDonalds for the pay new hires are getting here,” she said.

A young worker said he had voted for Will “because he is for the people,” and said the two biggest issues facing workers at the plant were “the rollover of TPTs [temporary part-time workers] and the layoffs,” which Will said had to be opposed.

Several workers repeated that Will “was for the people” while the UAW officials ignored their concerns. This fact was underscored by the letter issued by Local 140 President Eric Graham, which blamed workers for “unacceptable” absentee rates and echoed management threats to close the plant if workers did not bow to the company’s demands.

John, another veteran worker with 23 years, said, “For president, I voted for Will Lehman. We need change. We got to start at the top. If we bring people together, we can be as strong as we were in the 1960s and 1970s.”

He said that strikes were going on right now in France and that autoworkers had to pay attention. In the UAW and the American government, he continued, “We need to put the decision in the hands of the people.” He also denounced the fact that the UAW was only paying \$400 a week in strike pay to 1,100 striking workers at farm and construction manufacturer CNH Industrial in Iowa and Wisconsin. “Meanwhile, the UAW reps are voting themselves a raise. They never go on strike, they don’t have to worry about it.” He concluded, “Power to the people, to the people.”

At the adjacent Warren Stamping Plant, which has also been hit by layoffs, several workers stopped and told campaigners why they voted for Will Lehman. “He seemed like the best choice,” one said. Referring to the UAW’s refusal to fight layoffs and plant closings, he added, “I got 24 years here and I want to make it to my 30, and it sounds like he might make that happen.”

Another stamping worker added, “I didn’t vote yet, but I’m going to vote for Will. It’s time for change. I’m tired to see people go to jail and go to prison,” he said, referring to the dozen top UAW executives, including the last two UAW International presidents, who were imprisoned for taking company bribes or embezzling union dues. “It’s time for a change. I’ve been here for 10 years, it’s getting old.” Referring to the job cuts, he said, “You don’t even know if your job is safe, so I’m voting for Will.”



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