

“He’s fighting for everything everybody wants”: More Michigan and Ohio autoworkers say why they are voting for Will Lehman for UAW president

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

Over the last few days, supporters of Will Lehman’s campaign for president of the United Auto Workers visited several auto plants in Ohio and Michigan. Teams handed out hundreds of copies of Lehman’s statement opposing the elimination of the third shift at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant and other layoffs and spoke to workers about why they voted for Will or planned to when they got their ballot.

Toledo, Ohio Dana auto parts plant

Last year, the United Auto Workers and the United Steelworkers union rammed through a four-and-a-half-year contract on 3,500 workers at auto supplier Dana, which workers had initially voted to reject by 90 percent. For a month and a half, the unions ignored the overwhelming vote by members to launch a strike, which would have quickly shut down major auto plants.

The union bureaucrats launched a campaign of intimidation, threatening some workers with violence and conspiring with management to fire others in order to beat back opposition and get the deal ratified.

Campaigners spoke with workers at the Toledo, Ohio, Dana plant about why they were voting for Will. Sierra, a worker who’s been at Dana for five years, said, “I think he’s the man that’s going to lead us and get the power back on the floor. He’s our voice and I think he’s what we need as a union to get us together and keep us going.” She added, “We’ll have someone that’s for us, about us and cares.”

Dan, a worker with two years at the plant, said, “We rejected the last contract because we need more money. I’m getting

paid \$18 an hour by a billion-dollar company. People are very angry. The union is supposed to represent us, but it doesn’t. I like what your candidate is saying.”

Jeff, a worker with five years, said, “I voted for Will because he is the right guy to drive out the corrupt officials who ripped off our money, which we never got back. None of the UAW officials are now in prison. I agree with the rank-and-file committees he’s fighting for—but it is going to take a real fight. We voted down the first contract by 435–0. Then they said the second deal passed with only 375 workers out of 800 in the plant voting. The fix was in.”

“I’m tired of the union now catering to Dana. We want someone to fight for us, not them,” Bob said. “They don’t enforce anything in the contract. Whatever is good for the company, that’s what the union does.”

Brandon, a young Dana worker of two years, said, “We just got the union book. We didn’t get the full contract of what we voted on until a year after voting on it—it’s bad.”

When asked what issues are important to workers in the plant, he responded, “The first step is getting new union reps. They’re all working for the company, not us. We also definitely need to be making more money. Dana is a Fortune 500 company, yet there’s no compensation for the money we make for them. Meanwhile, everything is getting more expensive.”

A Dana worker who had just started at the plant this week said she is making only \$15 an hour.

Dana workers added that they get one 15-minute break during the day and a 25-minute lunch break during an eight-hour day. If there isn’t a safety violation for two months, workers then get an extra 15-minute break.

After campaigners spoke to many workers, UAW Local 12 officials at the Dana plant called management to remove Lehman’s team, in a clear violation of both the rights of the rank-and-file candidate to bring his views to UAW members and for workers to hear them.

Stellantis Toledo Jeep Assembly plant

A worker with 10 years at the Stellantis Toledo Jeep plant in northwestern Ohio said, "I voted for Will because he wants change. I'm sick of the corruption. The union acts like management. We had a big change in the local union, with a cleaning out of the house. But as soon as these guys got in, they were brainwashed and now they only do what management wants. Don't get me talking about safety in the plant. We haven't had a fire drill in three years. If there was a fire in there you couldn't evacuate because of all the machinery and parts in the way and it would be a catastrophe."

Mike, who's worked at Toledo Jeep for six years, said he had already cast his vote for Lehman, explaining, "Out of everybody on the ballot, he's the only one that brought up everything that we need to get back. Before we can get better, we have to get back what we had. He's fighting for everything everybody wants."

Robert, a supplemental employee (SE, formerly temporary part-time or TPT) who had transferred from the Belvidere Assembly Plant in northern Illinois, said that conditions for transfers and SEs are very poor at the plant. "I didn't ask to get shipped off here."

Many workers spoke out about and denounced the layoffs by Stellantis in Detroit.

Industrial Park in Highland Park, Michigan with Magna International, Forvia (formerly Faurecia) and Yanfeng auto parts suppliers

Sandy, an auto parts worker, told campaigners she was voting for Lehman "because I like the truth. I like truth to stand in front of injustice, to stand in front of everything. Because we've fallen and we've got to get up! He's honest and he's saying what everybody else is thinking—and that's important."

Another worker at parts maker Yanfeng said about conditions in his plant, "Right now, everything's been slow. People have been laid off, and unfortunately for people that are inside, we're working at least three or four stations."

"My goal is to feed my family," he continued.

A General Motors worker at the Lansing Delta assembly plant said, "We should put the billion in assets in the [UAW] strike fund in our hands. This place is in sad shape and a lot needs to be fixed. Managers are pitiful and have no idea how to operate this production business."

"Workers don't have a say right now. They say we do but we don't. We know what we're doing. We tell them what needs to be done and they don't follow us. Will sounds good. I'll vote for him."

Another worker said, "I like what Will has to say. When I watched the debate, [current UAW President Ray] Curry was shaking in his boots. He's the least likeable person."

Ford Dearborn Truck Plant

On Tuesday afternoon, a campaign team handed out 1,300 fliers to workers at the Ford Dearborn Truck Plant.

One worker said he already was planning to vote for Will. "When I hired in, you had one job like shooting a gun or installing a bracket on the truck. Now you might have four or five different operations you have to do on every vehicle."

Kathy said she has eight years at the plant and supports Will's fight against the union apparatus, saying, "The union represents the company."

She described conditions in which most jobs are overloaded. The company is squeezing more and more out of every worker to extract more profit to pay for a new production facility that will produce the new electric truck.

"When I speak to my union rep about the overwork, he just says that the workload should even out after the new building is finished. But I don't believe it."

She continued, "We need to keep the power with the workers. Last week we were talking about supporting Will. I am supporting everybody like me."

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GM Lansing Delta Assembly