

“Workers everywhere want to fight”: Will Lehman holds powerful online rally as UAW elections enter final weeks

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The deadline to mail in ballots in the UAW election to ensure that they are counted is fast approaching (November 18). Vote for Will Lehman and mail your ballot today! If you have not received a ballot, go to uawvote.com and request one immediately. For more information on Lehman's campaign, visit WillforUAWPresident.org.

On Sunday, over 150 workers and supporters attended an online campaign rally held by United Auto Workers (UAW) presidential candidate Will Lehman.

The rally began with a powerful video of Lehman, a second-tier worker at Mack trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, explaining the basis of his campaign, accompanied by statements of support from workers across the US and, importantly, autoworkers in Mexico.

Lehman began his remarks by stating, “This campaign is about placing power where it belongs: with workers on the shop floor. I urge you to vote for me, and to talk to your coworkers about voting... By supporting my campaign, you are supporting the fight for rank-and-file power.”

The video showcased a compilation of workers throughout the country stating why they were voting for Lehman and describing the degrading conditions they were seeking to overcome. One worker at the Warren Truck plant in Michigan, asked about workers holding the power in the factories, replied, “That’s the way it should be.”

Lehman pointed to the deaths of workers in various industries, including Caterpillar worker Steven Dierkes, incinerated in a molten iron crucible in June; Illinois Stellantis worker and father of four Travis Baker, who died after being injured in August; and Catherine Pace, who died in March 2020 after contracting COVID-19 at the Stellantis Warren Truck Plant near Detroit. “The companies see these workers as less valuable than machines, who can be replaced as easily as replacing a part,” Lehman said.

At the same time, an unaccountable bureaucracy had developed within the UAW, Lehman explained, blocking workers’ struggles while enriching itself. “The UAW is staffed by people whose collective salaries are \$75 million a year. Over 450 staff make over \$100,000 a year, including two of my opponents, UAW president Ray Curry and international rep. Shawn Fain.”

He went on, “There is a massive parasitic apparatus sitting on top of us, dictating what we do, in bed with management, bribed and bought off.”

Lehman’s sentiments were echoed by many workers. Asked what the UAW does, one worker stated, “Nothing, just rob us.” “A racket, in my opinion,” and “nothing but crooks,” other workers said.

Lehman clearly summed up his call for workers to form rank-and-file committees, stating: “I have called for the development of rank-and-file committees at plant and workplace. Many workers have asked what I mean by this. The answer is simple. They are committees composed of and controlled by us, the workers, through which we can advance our own

demands and overrule the decisions of management and the apparatus.”

He continued, “Rank-and-file committees must control all UAW assets, \$1.08 billion in all, and must control national and local bargaining. Only in this way can we fight for what we need, not for what the corporations say is acceptable.”

Lehman ended his video statement with a call for the international unity of all sections of the working class in a coordinated struggle for their basic interests, including higher wages and improved working conditions:

The fight of workers in the UAW must be connected to a fight of every section of the working class. Educators, healthcare workers, Amazon and transport workers. Right now the rail workers are engaged in a fight against the rail companies, the White House and their own unions who are attempting to ram through agreements that have already been rejected [by the workers]. This is an experience that workers in the UAW know well, but it is an experience of all sections of the working class.

We have fought to unite workers in the US with workers in Mexico, Canada and throughout the world. The UAW apparatus promotes the bankrupt perspective of nationalism, pitting workers in the US against our class brothers and sisters. But when I talk to workers about the need for international unity ... there is enormous support.

Lehman’s call for international unity found a powerful echo in the remarks of Mexican worker Javier Martínez, who was fired from the GM Silao plant in 2019 for standing in solidarity with striking American workers that year. He called for his countrymen to “coordinate with US workers for a joint struggle. This is why I support Will Lehman for UAW president... Courage! We can do this!”

Introducing the discussion, Lehman began by stating that everywhere his campaign has gone, it has found that “workers everywhere do want to fight.” Many workers, he said, have been drawn to the “idea of internationalism, the idea of forming those bonds with these workers in other countries. So we can control where the production goes, having a say back on the factory floor, not being pushed around by bureaucrats and the companies. Lots of workers do want to fight.”

He continued, “The agreement with the points we raised, though, can’t end with just agreement, or just thinking that this is the correct way forward. It needs to take action.” Lehman appealed for workers to vote for him and mail their ballots back as soon as possible.

Ford Chicago

Lehman's program won strong support from the workers attending the meeting. One worker from the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, a member of the recently formed Ford Chicago Rank-and-File Election Committee, said she was voting for Lehman because "he is a rank-and-file worker like us. He is pissed off like we are." She brought up safety violations at her plant, including instances of being made to work while a tornado was nearby or while the lights were out in the factory.

She added, "We deserve way more pay. A 50 percent pay increase would be life-changing. The Ford executive makes over \$20 million a year. We deserve more!"

Another Ford Chicago worker said, "I just wanted to say, I support Will, because he's going to put up a real fight against all these companies that we all work for, and really put an effort to unite workers."

He explained, "I'm top pay, and as inflation's rising, my money is going less and less further.

"We've seen record profits for over 10 years, since the recessionary contracts, and there were at least two good opportunities to at least get back what we'd lost in those contracts, and the UAW failed us then, and they're going to fail us again. They're already gearing up for it.

"I also see a need for these rank-and-file committees," he continued. "We just started ours here in Chicago. I feel like it's a good way to just get people talking. Because I mean, people die, and they don't even address it, there's no spread of information. It's just irresponsible by the companies and the UAW.

"We're still in the beginning. But I support Will, and I think everybody I talked to supports Will and the key points that he's made."

Michigan

A temporary part-time worker at the GM Assembly plant in Flint said, "We need to abolish the tier system. That's why I'm voting for Will. But it's important to understand, we can't abolish tiers without abolishing the bureaucracy that implemented it."

Bill, a retired GM worker from the now-shuttered Pontiac Truck and Bus plant in Michigan, spoke on the imposition of concessions he had witnessed over many years. "I've seen a lot of stuff in the years I was working. The plant I retired from, it's now a vacant field."

Cuts to wages and benefits first began with the federal bailout of Chrysler in 1979, later spreading to GM and throughout the auto industry. The companies now, he said, are "in multibillions in profits, and they're just trying to squeeze the rank and file for every drop they can for the ruling class."

"I already voted for Will," he continued. "I put it on social media. It's important that we vote, and the rank and file needs to have a voice once again."

Blake, an auto parts worker from Flint, Michigan, spoke on the deadly impact of COVID in the plants, stating, "I joined a rank-and-file committee last year after my brother died of COVID. He had diabetes and other conditions, and he was mandated to work even though COVID was rampant in the plant."

He described his current work: "Conditions are filthy. We don't even have toilet paper. The owner is a tyrant, firing people at will for no reason."

Speaking on the danger of nuclear war, he stated, "We also need to stop this capitalist war that is being fought for money."

Missouri

A veteran worker from the General Motors plant in Wentzville, Missouri also spoke in support of rank-and-file committees, saying, "First of all, I think rank-and-file committees are very important, because it gets our voice across not only to the company and the plants, but addresses our safety and concerns too. And I'm sick and tired of GM Wentzville not fixing anything and they wait 'til somebody actually gets hurt. Like, why? That doesn't need to happen."

Workers, he urged, should "band together and let our voices be heard, instead of letting someone speak for us. I'm going to be voting for Will. He's for us, not for the bureaucrats at the top. And yes, we all need to unite throughout the whole world."

A worker at the Ford Kansas City Assembly Plant denounced the atmosphere of harassment and intimidation created by the UAW apparatus in the plant, saying, "Everything coming out of these guys' mouths is a lie. They put their guard down to the company and surrender to them." Voicing his support for Lehman, he concluded, "Will, I congratulate you for running for this position. I already voted for you. I have faith in you brother."

Solidarity from Mexico

Significantly, a group of Mexican autoworkers spoke through a translator in the course of the meeting. In 2019, during the national strike by 50,000 GM workers in the US, a group of workers at GM's plant in Silao, Mexico banded together and refused demands by the company for speed-up and overtime, in a courageous act of solidarity with their brothers and sisters in the US. Workers at the plant were met with a campaign of firings.

One of the Silao workers stated that the conditions faced by US autoworkers were no different from those faced by workers in Mexico. Responding to the safety violations experienced by the Chicago worker, he said, "There was an earthquake. Workers were forced to continue working even as the ground was shaking. Management and HR were able to go out, but workers had to stay. These are the injustices we need to fight against."

He continued, "Some people say I'm crazy because I want to fight back. Many workers are afraid to lose their jobs or their benefits. Maybe they are right, but we can't continue to tolerate these injustices."

Another Silao worker added, "The idea of workers fighting internationally is stupendous. Here in Mexico, people are very, very afraid to speak out. But by shaking off that fear, things would be very different."

"I'm asking for workers to begin picking up the fight"

During the meeting, Lehman appealed for workers to mail in their ballots as soon as possible, explaining what a vote for him for UAW president would represent.

Not only is it important to vote as a conscious rejection of the

UAW bureaucracy, and a conscious push towards the power being back in the hands of the rank and file on the factory floor; it's important to spread the word about the campaign to spread the message of exactly everything we're putting forward. The UAW, none of these other candidates are launching any kind of real effort for us to win in these coming fights ahead.

Summing up, Lehman concluded the meeting by stating, "It's not just about an election. I'm asking for more than that. I'm asking for workers to begin picking up the fight, wherever they are, whatever industry they're in, we need to start organizing if we're going to win. It's not going to be easy, but once workers are united together, there's nothing we can't overcome."

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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