

UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman visits HarperCollins picket lines

Daniel de Vries
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United Auto Workers presidential candidate Will Lehman visited striking HarperCollins workers last Friday, taking his campaign for rank-and-file power directly to the picket line.

Approximately 250 editors, designers, and other workers at the publishing giant, members of UAW Local 2110, have been out on strike since November 10. The strike at HarperCollins is part of a wave of struggles among academic and professional workers in the UAW. With the strikes of 48,000 academic workers in the University of California system and 1,600 part-time faculty at New York City's New School—along with 1,100 workers at heavy equipment maker CNH, who've been striking for more than six months—over 10 percent of all active UAW members are now walking the picket line.

The conditions HarperCollins workers are fighting against are common among broad sections of the working class. Pay at the publisher, which starts at \$45,000 and averages out at \$55,000 a year, makes it next to impossible to cope with the exorbitant cost of housing, child care, health care and other necessities in New York City. Many workers are pressured to work long hours without overtime pay. Like workers everywhere, their incomes are rapidly being eroded by inflation.

Lehman has sought to inform UAW members about the strike at HarperCollins and mobilize the support of the working class behind it. In a statement issued on November 8, Lehman explained, "Your fight is every worker's fight. An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us—and should be repelled by all of us."

On the picket line Friday, Lehman emphasized the need for HarperCollins workers to connect their struggle to other workers confronting the same basic issues, both in the US and internationally. "I'm running on an international basis. No matter what country workers are in, we should be appealing to them," he said. Lehman highlighted the example of autoworkers in Silao, Mexico, who refused to take on additional production during the 2019 GM strike in the US. "All of our interests as a class—the working class—are tied together," he said.

The issue of internationalism resonated with striking workers. HarperCollins is a global publishing company with an international workforce of over 4,000. It is owned by the Murdoch family, which controls one of the world's largest media and publishing empires.

Lehman discussed with workers how the UAW apparatus works to isolate strikes and other struggles from each other. In the case of HarperCollins, the bureaucracy has imposed a de facto information blackout, keeping the overwhelming majority of UAW members ignorant of the strike in New York City. Lehman explained that they are doing the same to striking workers at CNH in Wisconsin and Iowa. HarperCollins workers reported receiving "no communication" from their leadership about the struggles among workers within their union.

Lehman's campaign has sought to break through this isolation, calling on workers to form rank-and-file committees to connect with other workers and assert control over all aspects of their struggle. "My campaign is not only about an election," Lehman said Friday. "It's about connecting workers in the UAW with not only each other but other sections of the working class."

The starting point must be what workers need, not

what the companies say they can afford, Lehman explained. When the UAW bureaucracy consistently defends the supposed right of corporations to profit, “That’s not putting forward a workers agenda,” he said.

HarperCollins is now claiming poverty after two years of growing profits. Last quarter, which ended September 30, the company revealed that revenue declined 11 percent and profits fell 54 percent. The current outlook is a reversal from last year, when shareholders raked in over \$300 million in profit, a 42 percent increase from 2020.

Last month, HarperCollins initiated layoffs, including for six UAW members, making clear that they intend to make workers pay for changing market conditions which they have no control over. The assault on jobs is part of an overall strategy by the corporate oligarchy to counteract pressure for higher wages, with layoffs spreading throughout the technology sector, as well as at automakers such as Ford and Stellantis.

But rather than responding to HarperCollins’ attacks by mobilizing the thousands of other UAW members in Local 2110 and throughout New York City and the region in a common struggle to defend jobs, the union has instead promoted toothless appeals to the National Labor Relations Board.

The UAW bureaucracy has grown increasingly nervous over the growing rebellion among rank-and-file workers and the support Lehman’s campaign has been receiving. During Lehman’s visit, union officials attempted to prevent him from speaking to workers, at one point instructing him to leave, in clear violation of election rules, then intervening in discussions to attempt to intimidate workers from speaking.

The direct elections for the UAW’s national leadership this year are only taking place because of a sprawling, years-long corruption scandal, which revealed top union officials had been taking bribes from the corporations and embezzling workers dues. Faced with an election it didn’t want, the apparatus has responded by seeking to suppress voter turnout, with many UAW members unaware that elections are even taking place.

With voting deadlines drawing near and widespread reports from workers of problems getting their mail-in ballots, Lehman filed a lawsuit Thursday to demand that the deadlines be extended by 30 days, and that

serious measures be taken to inform all UAW members that the elections are taking place.

Will Lehman’s call for rank-and-file committees comes at a critical point in the development of the class struggle and the UAW elections themselves. The eruption of strikes of academic workers on both US coasts points to the immense potential for mobilizing the strength of the entire working class to fight against poverty-level wages and soaring inflation.



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