

UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman visits picket line at New School in New York City

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As the strike by more than 1,600 part-time faculty at the New School continued over improved wages and job security, United Auto Workers presidential candidate Will Lehman joined academic workers on their picket line Saturday in New York City.

Saturday was Lehman's second visit to support striking UAW members in the city in as many weeks. Last week, he met and spoke with striking workers at HarperCollins about their struggle against the giant publishing company.

Since then, 48,000 graduate student workers in the UAW at the University of California have also struck, joining 1,300 workers at the construction and farm equipment maker Case New Holland who have been out more than six months. All told, around 15 percent of active UAW members are currently on strike.

Lehman is the only UAW presidential candidate to appear on the picket line of any ongoing strikes. In contrast to the union apparatus, which has refused even to make all members aware of the strikes, Lehman is mobilizing members in the UAW and beyond to connect with each other through the construction of rank-and-file committees.

Josh Bavrell, who teaches sound design at the New School, told Lehman, "During the pandemic, we gave back. They made no contribution to our retirement fund. I would like to see that come back, you know. Once you give back, you don't seem to get back."

"One thing I'm calling for to help get that back is the broadening of the fight," Lehman responded. "Right now, workers at UC—48,000 of them are on strike—and at Case New Holland. Workers need to connect those strikes and fight until we do get those things back."

Lehman pointed to the ongoing struggle among rail workers to beat back intolerable working conditions as an example of a developing movement of workers across industries that must be unified. This is fundamentally an international issue, Lehman stressed, referring to discussions he's had with Indian and German autoworkers to resist the

corporations' efforts to pit workers in one country versus another.

Mariano Aguirre, a part-time instructor for more than 20 years, explained to Lehman the main issues at stake in the strike. "We're demanding fair wages. We also are demanding to be more engaged and included in the policies of the entire New School University. Specifically, I'm a teacher at Mannes College, which is the school of music, the school of drama/performing arts. We have, on average, a 30 percent lower salary than the rest of the university. So we want to stop being discriminated and treated separately from the other divisions at the New School."

"One thing I'm running on is the abolition of tiers," Lehman, himself a second-tiered worker at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, responded. He explained how the auto companies, in collaboration with the UAW apparatus, have divided workers up using a variety of classifications to increase exploitation. "That is essentially what you have here, the same as in auto plants," Lehman said.

Lehman and his campaign supporters also explained the lawsuit Lehman has filed against the UAW bureaucracy's efforts to deny workers the right to vote for the president and other International Executive Board positions.

The lawsuit, *Lehman v. The UAW*, seeks to compel the union to extend the deadlines to request and submit ballots by 30 days. Lehman explained that only 9 percent of members have voted as the result of the anti-democratic actions of the UAW apparatus. A large percentage of workers throughout the union are not even aware that the elections are taking place and never received ballots. Workers also reported some UAW reps also falsely told temporary part-time workers they were ineligible to vote.

Several UAW members on the picket line Saturday said they never got a ballot in the mail or were unaware the deadline to request another ballot had already passed. Lehman's fight to ensure the fundamental right to vote in the election found strong support from workers at the New

School.

The day before Lehman's visit, strikers spoke to WSWs reporters about their strike.

"We need improved health care and benefits, real job security, and we must get an increase in compensation," one part-time instructor said. "I am a single parent and with what I make right now it is really hard for me and my son to get by. This is one of several jobs that I am working at the moment to make ends meet.

"The vast majority of my work is done outside of class time, outside of the classroom," he continued. "I'm trying to be a prepared, engaging, and present instructor for my students, which requires that I make time for one-on-one meetings and, very importantly, stay on top of new developments in my field. I put in a lot of hours for the university outside of the classroom and should be compensated for it. This is true for adjuncts across the board, not just at the New School. Also, they can fire you anytime and abruptly cancel classes. This needs to stop."

Responding to the support University of California academic workers are getting from broader sections of the working class, he explained, "The refusal of construction and other workers to cross the UC picket line is very powerful. This is the kind of support we need. Who are the people honking their horns in support of our picket line? It's the sanitation workers, truckers and other city workers. They support this struggle and we should work with them. Imagine what would happen. We could shut this city down."

Commenting on Will Lehman's lawsuit against the UAW's effort to suppress the vote, he said, "I haven't received a ballot for the union election and support an extension. It's ridiculous that only 9 percent of the membership has voted and everything should be done to ensure that all of us are able to cast a vote."

Merry, who teaches Game Development at the New School, said, "I was doing graduate work at [New York University] when we went on strike at NYU in 2021. We had some gains and it gave me faith in the movement to strike. I was struck by how aggressively NYU responded. They accused us of not coming to the bargaining table in good faith.

"Here, the New School is not even offering to get close to what we need. Benefits are basically non-existent... I cannot even qualify for medical benefits until after a semester working here."

The New School "is not interested in funding education," she said, adding, "It is a good idea to unite the school struggles. The recent NYU strike vote and settlement for adjuncts could have been done together with the New School by the UAW. They were only two weeks apart."

Scores of students at the New School came out in support

of striking faculty on the picket line.

Jenny, a student in the Illustration Department, explained, "All of my teachers are part-time. They are treated like crap. They give as much time as they can, but outside of school, they have to hold two or three other jobs because of the low pay."

Another student, Layla, said, "I came here to get a good education, a degree worth something, not to pay for [New School President Dwight] McBride's luxury penthouse. A \$15 million residence! And I've heard he rarely uses it! Plus, he makes over a million dollars a year. It's completely crazy. Imagine what the workers here could do with \$15 million. It would make a huge difference for people who can barely afford to live in this expensive city. We need to fight to get what they need."

"We're out here to support our instructors, who make this university run and are paid nothing," Anayah, a New School student, remarked. "We love our teachers; they put in a ton of work and make an effort to always be there for us. Without them we would not be receiving an education at this institution. They deserve much more than they are getting."

Leah, a fellow-student, commented, "We have to support them. Our fight is connected to their fight, which is connected to the fights on other campuses, at other schools. The support that the UC strikers are getting from other workers is amazing. These struggles are all part of a much broader issue and I'm all for an expansion of this strike. Isolation doesn't make sense."

For more information and to get involved in the Will Lehman's campaign, visit <https://willforuawpresident.org>.



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