

Speech to the December 10 IYSSE anti-war rally

An anti-war movement must be led by the working class

Will Lehman
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The following are the remarks by Will Lehman to the December 10 rally, “For a Mass Movement of Students and Youth to Stop the War in Ukraine!” organized by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.

Lehman is a rank-and-file worker at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania who ran for president of the United Auto Workers union in the United States. For more information on joining the IYSSE, visit iysse.com.

I’m Will Lehman, I work at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and this year I ran for international president of the United Auto Workers union.

I support the building of a mass movement to stop the Ukraine war. The unending and expanding wars of the United States abroad are inseparable from the escalating war on the working class at home.

Only two weeks ago, the US Congress, with the support of both the Democrats and Republicans, passed a law prohibiting 100,000 railroad workers from striking, forcing them to accept a contract that they had rejected. The rail workers want to fight for what workers throughout the world demand: a decent standard of living, wages that keep pace with soaring inflation and work schedules that allow them to spend time with their families.

The US always justifies its wars abroad by claiming that it is defending “freedom” and “democracy,” but the moment that workers here take any action in defense of our interests, the ruling class doesn’t hesitate to utilize the power of the state to suppress us. If railroad workers were to defy the attempt to ram this contract down their throats, there is no doubt that the corporations and the rich would mobilize the army to

enforce their dictates.

The American working class is beginning to understand this, a process that has the most profound consequences for the fight against war.

I ran for president of the United Auto Workers this year on a platform of abolishing the pro-corporate and nationalist union bureaucracy and transferring power to workers on the shop floor.

I made clear that I was advancing a program for the international unity of the working class, stressing that workers in every country have the same interests. I explained that I am a socialist opposed to capitalist exploitation wherever it exists. I spoke out against the wars of the American ruling class, explaining to my co-workers that these wars are waged on behalf of the rich and that we have no interest in fighting them. And many, many workers agreed.

Despite the suppression of votes by the UAW apparatus, thousands of workers voted for this program. In my discussions with workers, I encountered enormous support for uniting workers in every country in a common struggle against our class enemies.

During my campaign, I spoke with workers in Germany, Sri Lanka, India and Mexico, and I found that we all want to fight for the same things. Workers throughout the world should draw enormous encouragement from the growth of the class struggle in the United States. The American ruling class wages continuous war abroad, but its most dangerous enemy is here at home.

The image of the United States seen by workers in other countries is constantly distorted by the propaganda of the American ruling class. The United States is supposedly the wealthiest country in the

world, the land of the “American dream,” but in fact the vast wealth of the country is controlled almost exclusively by a tiny corporate and financial elite.

And workers in far too many countries have had bombs dropped on their homes and their governments overthrown by the American imperialist war machine. Having only experienced these brutal acts of violence, millions of workers internationally think this is all that exists in the United States.

But there are two Americas, the America of the ruling class and the America of the working class. The majority of the American population does not support war, which is carried out behind our backs.

The crimes of US imperialism are covered up, and those who expose them, like Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, are imprisoned and tortured. Like workers throughout the world, American workers want to be able to live decent lives, free from poverty and want.

The railroad workers are part of a growing movement that includes 50,000 academic workers who are currently on strike, dockworkers who are laboring under expired contracts, teachers facing the decimation of public education, health care workers confronting the collapse of the health system under the impact of the pandemic, young service workers who do not make enough to survive, let alone start a family.

After decades of social counterrevolution, American workers are beginning to see through the propaganda from both parties that attempts to divide us against each other, and that seeks to pit us against our class brothers and sisters throughout the world.

It is this social force that must be mobilized in opposition to imperialist war. There will be no significant anti-war movement that is not led by the working class. That is the essential lesson of the history of the struggle against war.

It is on the basis of the class struggle that the international working class will unite against all the evils and consequences of capitalism, from climate change and environmental degradation, to inequality and exploitation, to the growth of fascism and dictatorship.

In the fight against war, our banner must be inscribed with the words of Marx and Engels 170 years ago: “Workers of the World, Unite! We have nothing to lose but our chains!”



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