

“The vote was not legitimate!”: Kentucky Ford workers demand fair election

Tim Rivers
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Last week, supporters of Will Lehman, the rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker and socialist who is running for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, visited Ford’s Kentucky Truck Plant (KTP) and nearby Louisville Assembly Plant (LAP). They spoke to workers about the official protest Lehman filed over voter suppression by the UAW bureaucracy, which resulted in a less than 10 percent turnout by the UAW members and an illegitimate “runoff” between two handpicked representatives of the UAW apparatus.

KTP and LAP workers are part of UAW Local 862, a large amalgamated local with 8,600 members in the Louisville area. Like other autoworkers, they are fed up with the collusion of the UAW with the corporations, which has led to endless job cuts, the evisceration of any shop floor protection and decades of losses in real wages.

“If you don’t have the membership voting, then it’s not really a vote,” a veteran KTP worker told the WSW. “It would just be null and void. I have been here for 24 years, and I have noticed a distinct change in the policies of our union. All the concessions that we have made because the company was supposedly in dire straits. Now you see record-breaking profits every year, yet the concessions still seem to be with us. Lots of important people get rich,” he said, but workers “continue to stifle.”

Discussing the impact of inflation, the worker continued, “Everything is more expensive for us to live, and yet we are still making the exact same amount of money. We gave up COLA, pensions; and I don’t like the two-tier system. If I’m working a job and the guy working across from me is doing the same job, he should get paid what I get paid.”

At the Louisville Assembly Plant, Larry Newkirk told the campaign team that during the voting in November, the workers he talked to were not even aware an election was taking place.

“I voted for Will Lehman. He wants to bring back Cost

of Living, plus get a 50 percent pay raise. We have got to fight for it to recover the standard of living that we have lost. We lost quite a bit in those last couple rounds of contract concessions. He was the only one fighting for it, and everybody else are like company people.

“Curry and Fain, two union apparatus people, are the only ones in the election. Now they want everybody to know about it,” Larry said, referring to posters in the plant, an email campaign and other appeals by the UAW to vote in the runoff, which never occurred in the first round of voting late last year. Nevertheless, he said, “A lot of people at the LAP plant still do not know there is an election.”

Larry said he only learned about the election last year because supporters of Will Lehman visited his factory. “I wouldn’t have known about it if it wasn’t for the campaign. I just happened to be here at the right time, I guess. It cannot be a fair election if everybody does not know about it.”

The worker spoke about Ford’s global assault on jobs. “Ford is laying off 3,200 employees in Europe. My friends up north said that’s a good thing because it means more jobs here in the US. But I told them, Ford layoffs overseas are not a good thing. We need to protect all the jobs.” Larry said he was very attracted to Lehman’s fight to unify Ford and other workers across national borders to fight the global auto companies.

Last July, Lehman spoke at a meeting sponsored by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which brought together Ford workers from India and Germany. The workers in Chennai, known as the “Detroit of India,” have fought against the collusion of their union with Ford management and the southern state of Tamil Nadu’s DMK government, which has resulted in the closure of their plant and the destruction of 4,000 Ford jobs and as many as 40,000 in related industries.

Ford workers at the Saarlouis plant, near the French border in Germany, also participated in the meeting. With the assistance of the IWA-RFC, they have established an independent action committee to defend jobs against the efforts by Ford to whipsaw them against their counterparts in Spain through a bidding war between the unions in their respective countries to secure production of a new electric vehicle in 2026.

The Spanish unions agreed to freeze wages for the next four years, limit future raises to 1.6 percent, cancel several holidays and extend daily work time by 15 minutes. Last month, IG Metall in Germany offered to cut workers' wages by 18 percent and force workers to accept unpaid overtime amounting to 20 extra days of work per year. This would cover not only the 4,600 workers whose jobs are threatened by the closure of the Saarlouis plant but all 22,000 German Ford workers.

Larry expressed the disgust with the corrupt UAW bureaucracy. Speaking of incumbent UAW president Ray Curry and long-time UAW International Representative Shawn Fain—who are facing off in the current runoff—Larry said, "We need to get rid of these insiders that work for the company. They sit on company boards. That is a conflict of interest which should not be allowed. No wonder we keep losing concessions year after year. The UAW in general is literally in the company's pocket and getting paid off."

During the first round of the election, Lehman won 128 votes at UAW Local 862, demonstrating that there is a strong foundation for his call for the abolition of the UAW apparatus, the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor through the setting up of rank-and-file committees, and his socialist and internationalist program.

For more information about Lehman's protest and the fight to build rank-and-file committees go to: <https://www.willforuawpresident.org> or fill out the form below.



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