

Join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees!

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This is the report delivered by Will Lehman to the 2023 International May Day Online Rally held on April 30. Lehman is a socialist rank-and-file worker at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, who ran for president of the United Auto Workers union in the United States. To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

My name is Will Lehman, I'm an autoworker at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania. Last year, I was the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committee's candidate for president of the United Auto Workers.

I ran because the situation autoworkers confront is abysmal. Hundreds of thousands of jobs have been cut in recent decades, and real wages are a fraction of what they used to be. The rising cost of living, worsened by the US-led war against Russia, has made it almost impossible to get by. Meanwhile, the corporations are posting massive profits up and down the auto supply chain.

I didn't run to fix the UAW bureaucracy from within. The election proved once again that this is not possible. The massive UAW apparatus is simply an appendage of the auto corporations. In fact, the UAW elections only took place because of a years-long corruption scandal, in which many union executives were caught taking bribes from the companies and stealing our dues money.

I campaigned on abolishing the union apparatus and putting all power and decision-making in the hands of workers on the shop floor and in other workplaces. To unleash workers' collective strength, I called for the construction of rank-and-file committees throughout the auto industry, under the leadership of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Running on this platform as a

proud socialist, I won nearly 5,000 votes—5 percent of the total.

The UAW bureaucracy was so hostile to giving rank-and-file workers a voice that they refused to notify the vast majority of the union's 1.1-million-person membership that an election was even taking place! They took next to no action to even send the rank-and-file ballots to their real addresses.

The vast majority of UAW locals never posted about the election on their websites or on Facebook, never sent texts to workers telling them an election was taking place, and never walked through the plants to remind us to vote, in the hopes that we would not be able to exercise our rights. We weren't even given the option of getting ballots at work or at local union halls. As a result, only 104,000 votes were cast, a turnout of 9 percent—the lowest in any national union election in US history.

My campaign sued the UAW in federal court before the election even took place to demand action be taken to protect workers' right to vote. The UAW and the Biden administration argued in court against me, and a federal judge dismissed my case on the bogus grounds that since I got a ballot, my right to vote was not violated, even though the judge himself noted that the UAW's method of notifying everyone "kind of cut out the membership."

I later learned that Crowell and Moring and the law firms that comprise the court-appointed monitor, charged with ensuring the fairness of the election, are longtime representatives of General Motors and other auto companies.

Such is the state of "democracy" in America, where the most basic rights of the working class are treated with total contempt by the companies, the courts, the government and the union bureaucracies. The union

leadership that emerged out of this election is illegitimate and does not reflect the will of the rank-and-file. Shawn Fain, the new UAW president, is known as “president 3 percent” since he was elected with votes from only 3 percent of eligible rank-and-file members.

But the support of such a wide cross-section of workers for my campaign exploded the myth that workers in America are hopelessly opposed to socialism. The vote for my campaign as a socialist for UAW presidency reveals that there is a broad constituency in the working class in the US to end the dictatorship of the corporations and to put into practice the slogan of my campaign: “Power to the rank and file!”

Over the course of my campaign, many workers asked me, “What is a rank-and-file committee?” and “What is the IWA-RFC?”

The answer: Rank-and-file committees are democratic organizations run by workers on the shop floor. They are *necessary* to carry the fight forward. Through these committees, workers share information, plan common action and link up across each shift and production line so everyone is on the same page. Critically, rank-and-file committees are the way workers can unite across all plants and corporations so that they can link together in a network that breaks down the isolation imposed by the union bureaucracies and unleashes the full strength of the entire working class.

Each committee is part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, a worldwide network of committees which unites us across national borders and gives us the power to coordinate an international response to the transnational corporations.

The need for international unity is absolutely necessary. For decades, the nationalist approach of unions everywhere has forced workers into a race to the bottom against each other. This must come to an end. Just as workers have no interest in fighting each other over wages, we also have no interest in fighting each other in wars.

This year’s May Day rally is taking place as the class struggle is erupting to the surface around the world.

2023 has already seen a rapid growth of strikes and class battles by workers internationally. Millions of workers have demonstrated against French President Macron’s pension cuts. In the UK, hundreds of

thousands of workers have engaged in walkouts, fighting to win raises to keep up with soaring prices.

Inflation and demands for higher wages have similarly driven tens of thousands of workers to walk out in Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and Canada since the start of the year.

Our common interests as members of the international working class are becoming increasingly clear, whether you’re a train driver in Germany, a postal worker in the UK, an airline worker in Nigeria, a teacher in Brazil, an autoworker in Detroit, or a tea plantation worker in Sri Lanka.

Workers everywhere are confronting the same basic issues:

- There’s the cost-of-living crisis making food, housing and other basic necessities unaffordable, a crisis which is being drastically worsened by the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine
- There are mass layoffs and job cuts, as the ruling class seeks to undermine and suppress the movement for higher wages and intensify exploitation
- Then there’s the unsafe and frequently deadly working conditions, the product of the prioritization of corporate profits over workers’ health and lives
- And finally, there’s the growth of social inequality to obscene and stratospheric levels, with the giant corporations and the super-rich gorging themselves on profits during the pandemic, while millions of workers around the world needlessly died from COVID-19.

It is becoming clearer to ever-larger numbers of workers that all of the problems we face are global problems, whether imperialist war, the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic crisis, or climate change. To make sure these problems are resolved in the interests of the working class, we require a global strategy and an organization which can carry out that strategy. The IWA-RFC is providing such a strategy, organization and leadership. I urge all of our listeners today to join its ranks and take up this fight.



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