

“What the UAW tried to do at Mack Trucks is a warning to all workers”: Will Lehman visits Toledo Jeep picket lines

Jerry White
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For updates and to discuss joining the Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee, text MACK to (877) 861-4428.

Striking Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman visited the picket lines at the Stellantis Toledo Jeep Complex on Saturday to discuss the common fight workers are facing against the auto and truck manufacturing corporations. Lehman ran as a socialist candidate for UAW president last year, running a program of transferring power from the UAW bureaucracy to workers on the shop floor.

Lehman was warmly greeted by striking Jeep workers eager to learn about the Mack Trucks strike. Nearly 4,000 Mack workers in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Florida walked out on October 9. The strike began after workers overwhelmingly rejected a contract endorsed by UAW President Shawn Fain, as well as national and local UAW officials.

Lehman and the Mack Trucks Rank-and-File Committee led the campaign to defeat the sellout contract. The deal included sub-inflation pay raises (averaging less than 4 percent a year over five years), did not restore COLA (cost-of-living adjustments), continued the two-tier wage and benefit system and lengthened the workday at the Macungie, Pennsylvania, assembly plant by 30 minutes. Fain had praised the blatantly pro-company agreement as a “record contract for the Heavy Truck industry.”

Lehman spoke to Jeep workers about the open letter the Mack Trucks rank-and-file committee issued to Fain debunking the UAW president’s hypocritical claims to be supporting their strike. In opposition to the bogus “stand up strike” policy, which has kept 112,000 out of the 146,000 UAW members on the job producing profits for the Big Three automakers, the committee demand the UAW call the plants out now.

On the same day that Lehman was in Toledo and Detroit

working to unite Mack and Big Three workers, Fain flew down to Pennsylvania and Maryland to try to contain the revolt of Mack workers. At local union meetings, Fain was challenged by rank-and-file workers. Fain absurdly claimed he didn’t know much about the contract and only endorsed it based on what he had been told by other UAW officials.

“What happened at Mack was a test case for the rest of the UAW”

In his visit to the picket lines in Toledo, Lehman was accompanied by several members of rank-and-file committees from the Toledo Jeep Complex and nearby Dana Driveline plant who are also fighting for an all-out strike by Big Three autoworkers.

On the first picket line, Will told a veteran worker, “Fain endorsed our deal and then turned around and claimed he supported our strike. We were set to strike two weeks ago and about nine minutes before the 11:59 p.m. deadline on October 1, we get a message about a tentative agreement and every one report to work. Two days later we got the ‘highlights’ that included a 19 percent pay raise over five years, after we took an effective cut of 22 percent in the last contract.

“What Fain tried to ram through at Mack is a warning to workers. We have the potential to win but we have to unite together, that’s what our open letter is all about.”

The worker responded, “We want cost-of-living protection too. We lost COLA in 2009 and we never got it back. When Wayne Assembly, Toledo and Wentzville went out, we all should have gone out. They didn’t. If

you are going to shut it down, it all goes down.”

In another conversation, Lehman said, “I want workers to know that similar substandard deals will be brought back to you, they will dress it up and try to ram it through. What happened at Mack was a test case for the rest of the UAW. Fain wanted to see how low workers were willing to take. One Mack worker told me, if we were to approve this, what would that say to the workers in the Big Three?”

Ken responded, “Yeah, even Canada Ford the union accepted a terrible contract, which they claimed was a ‘record offer.’

“I agree 110 percent that we should unite with workers in Canada, Mexico and other countries, and I can’t see why we can’t be united. We all have the same goals and are doing the same kind of work, it might not be the same cars, but we’re doing the same kind of work. Union or not, we need to take a stand. This struggle gets the message across for whatever field of employment, from automotive, agricultural, UPS, we have to unite.”

Before Lehman got to another picket, a Jeep worker had read the open letter out loud to his fellow strikers. When Lehman got there, the worker told him, “I liked the letter. You were saying a lot of what I felt.” Addressing himself to Mack workers, he said, “You have to get your money. We need to shut this industry down. Like you said, everybody voted to strike and there is no reason anyone should be working while we are out here. Everybody should be out fighting for what we want.”

Lehman also addressed Fain’s claims that an all-out strike would drain the strike fund. “Every UAW member should be out together,” he said. “It’s not about protecting the strike fund, it’s about fighting for what we need. That’s what a strike fund is. It is set up with our dues for when we want to fight. It is not a piggy bank for the union officials.”

“We are calling for international workers’ solidarity. We are fighting transnationals. I don’t have any enemies at any of those other countries, they’re workers like us.” A worker interjected, “It’s the same company all over the world. The French workers have fought for a 32-hour workweek and against raising the retirement age. I think we got the idea of the 32-hour week from them.”

Lehman said it was necessary to fight for a shorter workweek, without any loss in pay, especially under conditions in which the corporations are saying that it takes 40 percent less labor hours to produce electric vehicles.

“The issue is who gets the benefit of the technological

advance? If the companies can’t reduce our hours with no loss of pay it raises the need to put the industry under public ownership, with the workers running it for our needs. They try to split us up based on country, but we can say no, we want unity, and we want to control the means of production, not the capitalist owners.”

Another Jeep worker who read the open letter from the Mack workers told Will, “My sister is a nurse at a hospital the UAW organized a few years back. They negotiated a rotten deal and forced it on the rank and file. That’s when I realized that the UAW could not be trusted to fight and win gains for us. That’s what is happening with the Big Three negotiations now. There needs to be an all-out strike like we all voted for.”

After visiting the picket lines, Lehman told the WSWs, “Today, we had workers from three different rank-and-file committees coming together with striking workers to discuss and debate the most pressing issues we face. The UAW bureaucracy fears such discussions because it reveals that the biggest obstacle we face is not any lack of willingness to fight, but a union apparatus that is working against us.

“I was struck how invested workers were in the political arguments they were making to each other, with some saying we should allow Fain to try his way, and others expressing far greater support for the call for an all-out fight. We discussed that the strike fund is our money.

“Workers asked me if I had been elected what would I have done differently. I said I would call on workers to build rank-and-file committees in every plant to abolish the UAW apparatus and put power in the hands of the workers. These committees would be coordinating with each other to shut down the whole industry, and unite with our brothers and sisters around the world, and all workers who are fighting capitalist exploitation.”



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