

“All UAW members should be on strike”: Will Lehman discusses Mack workers open letter with Detroit workers

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Will Lehman concluded a successful tour of the Detroit area on Tuesday, ending it by visiting the picket lines of 3,700 striking casino workers who launched their first ever strike earlier in the day. Workers walked out at MGM Grand, MotorCity and Hollywood Casino at Greektown to oppose poverty wages, which start as low as \$11 an hour, and the quadrupling of out-of-pocket health care costs demanded by the giant casino chains.

Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker from Pennsylvania who is also on strike, ran as a socialist candidate for United Auto Workers president last year, on a program of transferring power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor. He came to the Detroit area to speak to workers about the open letter to UAW President Shawn Fain published by the Mack Trucks Rank-and-File Committee.

The committee led the campaign to defeat a sellout contract backed by UAW President Shawn Fain, which only included a 19 percent raise over five years, no cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), no elimination of tiers, and granted management power to override seniority rights and extend the workday. To strengthen the 4,000 striking Mack workers and Big Three workers too, the open letter demanded that Fain call out all 146,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis UAW members instead of the bogus “stand up strike policy,” which has kept three out of four workers on the job producing profits for the automakers.

“The Mack Trucks workers rejected this trash

contract and essentially forced the strike,” Will told a group of Stellantis workers at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant. “Workers in the Big Three voted by 97 percent to strike. They didn’t vote to work under an expired contract, no one authorized that, they just rammed it through, and if we all fight, we should be together.” The group of workers nodded in agreement with one saying, “We’re tired of producing when we got people on the street [striking].”

Another worker said to Lehman, “I think we should all be out together. They still have money coming in the pipeline. Every truck that comes off the line goes into money they’re making. The only way you are going to get them to negotiate is by us not working and them not making their money so they can’t fill their yacht up with \$35,000 worth of gas—about what a TPT [temporary part-time worker] makes in a year. Nice meeting you Will, I voted for you, and I’d vote for you again.”

At the Ford Dearborn Truck Plant many workers had heard Executive Chairman William Clay Ford Jr. make threats against their jobs earlier in the day. Ford told workers they had to accept the company’s concessionary demands or the company would close factories like the historic Rouge Complex and carry out mass layoffs. He demanded that the UAW bureaucracy shut down its strikes and said the refusal of workers to surrender would threaten the entire US auto industry and “national security.” Ford Jr. pocketed \$17.3 million in 2022 and has an estimated net worth of over \$2 billion.

Earlier that day, Ford laid off 700 workers at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center, blaming it on slow sales of its F-150 Lightning, the electric version of its top-

selling truck. “We not going for these scare tactics,” one worker told Lehman. “We agree that we should be shutting this down until we win our demands.”

Lehman also spoke with workers at the Blue Cross/Blue Shield picket lines in downtown Detroit. More than 1,000 workers have been on strike against the health care insurer since September 14, fighting against their jobs being contracted out and to restore concessions accepted by the UAW in 2009, which deprived workers hired after that year of pensions and retiree health benefits.

Many workers told Lehman that they were angry over being kept in the dark by the UAW about negotiations. Lehman pointed to the section of the Mack Trucks workers’ open letter on “Rank-and-file control over negotiations,” which demands “detailed, daily reporting on all negotiations,” and “rank-and-file review over all proposals submitted by the UAW and the companies.”

“I agree with that,” a Blue Cross striker said, “They shouldn’t be holding any discussions behind our backs. We’re fighting for our jobs and our lives.”

Another worker added, “I have a lot of family members in the auto industry, and they are working with no contract. We are essentially fighting for the same things. For COLA, the tiers ending, and the increases in pay. We are out here walking but we are not getting enough information. We need that transparency. We are not chairpersons on this line, we need to know what’s going on.”

Along with executives from the Big Three auto companies, sitting on Blue Cross’s board of directors are several bureaucrats from the UAW, the Teamsters and other unions who are joining the attack on striking workers.

Many strikers said that they did not even know there was a national UAW election they could participate in last year. Lehman explained that the UAW bureaucracy deliberately suppressed the vote by refusing to sufficiently publicize the election or update mailing addresses to send out ballots to the members. As a result, more ballots came back with bad addresses than were recorded, and the election had the lowest turnout of any national union election in US history.

Lehman also spoke to workers on the picket lines about broader issues, including the Biden administration’s military aggression against Russia and

China, and Washington’s support for Israel’s war crimes against the Palestinians. “American workers have no enemies in other countries. We have to unite to oppose the wars overseas and the war against the working class at home,” he told one worker.

The veteran Blue Cross worker replied, “Even with us fighting for wages, even if we get what we want, are we going to be able to afford to live? Because the economy and the cost of living is shooting through the roof.

“They expect us to pay for these trillions they’re spending on war. We need to know the history of the Middle East, not what the news puts out there. What they are doing to the Palestinians is what they are trying to do to Ghana and other countries. They want their resources, including for electric vehicles. It’s one war to the next.

“They tell us anyone who opposes this is a terrorist, a murderer. You can’t learn from the news.” She concluded by telling Lehman, “Thanks for coming down to discuss this with us.”

Another Blue Cross worker said, “All these wars are about money. We, the workers are only a blip on the radar screen for those in authority. We have no say-so about all the money they are spending on these wars. But we need the money for the schools, health care and other things.” She agreed that workers in other countries were not the enemies of American workers. Referring to the Filipino workers who Blue Cross is contracting customer care jobs to, she said, “They have families to feed. We all need to come together to fight.”



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