

Socialist autoworker Will Lehman's message to Boeing strikers: Build rank-and-file committees to take control of your fight from the IAM bureaucrats!

Will Lehman
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On Sunday, October 27, at 3:00 p.m. Eastern/12:00 p.m. Pacific, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee (BWRFC) and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) will be holding an online meeting to build support in the working class behind the Boeing strike. Register for the meeting by clicking here.

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The following is a statement from Will Lehman, a socialist and Mack Trucks worker from Macungie, Pennsylvania. Lehman ran for president of the United Auto Workers in 2022 on a platform of abolishing, not reforming, the corrupt union bureaucracy and transferring power to the shop floor.

To my brothers and sisters at Boeing,

I congratulate you on your decision last Wednesday to reject the sellout deal put forward by the International Association of Machinists. In voting it down, you have taken a courageous stand not just for yourselves but for workers everywhere.

Your demands, including inflation-busting wages, restoration of pensions and job protections resonate strongly with autoworkers. Just as Boeing is slashing jobs and imposing cuts to pay for a crisis it created, the auto industry is laying off tens of thousands as it transitions towards electric vehicles. Like you, we are in a fight not only against company management and its shareholders but against the pro-corporate union bureaucrats and the two corporate parties.

You have now rejected a second sellout contract. This shows that the IAM bureaucrats are deliberately sabotaging you. No amount of pressure will convince

them to come back with anything better. District 751 President Jon Holden, obviously fuming and humiliated by your democratic decision, issued a statement Thursday night denouncing “no” voters as “bullies.”

The bureaucrats are the ones trying to intimidate you into submission. They have been starving you out with a meager \$250 per week in strike pay. They are not even seriously organizing picket lines anymore. They shut down the Textron Aviation strike in order to isolate you.

If you are to win your strike, you must lead it yourselves. You can only take your struggle forward if you organize a rebellion against the IAM bureaucracy.

You need organizations which you control, to transfer power from the corrupt officials in bed with management to the 33,000 IAM members at Boeing, as well as the company's global workforce.

Rank-and-file committees give workers the power to impose their will from below when the union bureaucrats try to violate it.

This organization, the Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee, is already being built. I urge you to join the committee and to speak with your coworkers to do the same. On picket lines, at rallies and meetings and in social media discussions, elect workers you know and trust to represent you and affiliate with the BWRFC and build it out into a broad, alternative leadership. Union officials must be excluded from your discussions and meetings to enforce the principle of workers' control.

The Boeing committee is fighting for what you need to win this strike. It has called for the tripling of strike

pay to \$750 per week, using the \$300 million in union assets you have paid for with your dues money. It calls for rank-and-file control over all future talks to prevent a third sellout contract.

The bargaining committee which has produced these deals does not enjoy your confidence and must be forced to step down. In its place, a new one must be elected composed only of workers from the shop floor. All future talks must be livestreamed, with workers given the full power to veto decisions made at the bargaining table that violate your mandate.

Workers should also organize to adequately staff the picket lines and to organize delegations to other workplaces to mobilize support.

You have to prepare yourselves for an inevitable government intervention. If the IAM can't shut down your strike for them, the government will resort to other methods. That is the lesson of the railroads two years ago, where Congress banned a strike and imposed a government-sponsored contract workers had rejected.

The government will not let your strike tie up production at a defense contractor, especially after Friday night's airstrikes against Iran, which mark the start of a major new and unpopular war in the Middle East. To meet this threat, you must appeal for support in the working class, both in the US and around the world, counterposing the power of the majority which creates all the wealth to the tiny minority of warmongers and oligarchs at the top.

We autoworkers know from our own experience the only viable strategy is one based on the initiative and organization of the rank and file. Last year, the United Auto Workers called a toothless strike only to produce a contract, again endorsed by the government, which is now being used to lay off thousands and close plants. Union President Shawn Fain, a top Biden ally installed as a fake "reformer," claims he is prepared to strike over layoffs—eventually, somewhere, maybe at a parts warehouse or two. There is nobody left who believes these lies.

In 2022, I ran for UAW president to mobilize my coworkers against the union bureaucracy that runs the UAW as a dictatorship. In a livestreamed debate with Fain, I declared, "I don't intend to work with any of them. My pivot the entire time has been to workers on the factory floor, forming rank-and-file committees and making the decisions ourselves. ... We need to

reorganize society, based on human need, not the system of private profit, of bargaining with the companies and doing what the companies say they will allow. We need a system that works for us."

Rank-and-file committees fight for workers' power not only on the shop floor and in the unions but in society at large. The Boeing Workers Rank-and-File Committee is organized as part of a network across the world, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which is establishing lines of contact to elaborate a common, worldwide strategy.

Many delegates from other IWA-RFC committees will be on an online meeting this Sunday at 3:00 p.m. Eastern/12:00 p.m. Pacific to discuss such a strategy for the Boeing strike. This is a democratic forum where everyone has the right to speak, free from intimidation and bullying from the union bureaucrats.

I urge you to attend this meeting. Strike while the iron is hot. Let's build a strong movement which can bring Boeing, Wall Street and the corporate political parties to their knees. We workers are the most powerful force on earth because we produce all of the world's wealth. We only have to learn how to use this power.



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