

Economic nationalism divides us. International socialism is the answer.

Will Lehman
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The following statement originally appeared in the online edition of Newsweek on May 12. Will Lehman is a Mack Trucks worker and was a candidate for United Auto Workers president in the union's 2022 elections. He is a leading member of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain is promoting President Donald Trump's economic nationalism, claiming tariffs will defend our jobs and livelihoods. But this is a fraud and a deadly danger to the entire working class.

The alternative to global capitalist exploitation is not protectionism in the service of our "own" ruling class, but the international unity of workers against a common enemy: the transnational corporations that exploit our labor. Economic nationalism divides us and weakens our fight.

Trump's trade war policies are not about protecting workers. They are preparations for war—specifically, a potential war with China. His sweeping tariffs are designed to enrich the ruling elite and military-industrial complex while whipping up hatred against Chinese workers, who are not our enemies but our class brothers and sisters.

Within hours of Trump's so-called "Liberation Day" tariff announcement, Stellantis idled its Windsor and Toluca plants in Canada and Mexico, impacting more than 7,000 workers. In the United States, 900 layoffs followed at facilities in Michigan and Indiana. Since then, layoffs have hit Stellantis workers at Warren Truck and other metro Detroit plants; GM workers at Factory Zero in Detroit and Oshawa, Canada; and Volvo-Mack Trucks workers in Virginia, Maryland and my own plant in Pennsylvania.

These layoffs are a direct result of Trump's

nationalist policies—and Fain's support for them.

In an April 11 livestream, Fain tried to dodge responsibility. While continuing to support trade war, he claimed, "We are not aligning everything we do with the Trump administration ... We are negotiating with the Trump administration." He added, "It is a mistake to defend the status quo when it comes to free trade."

This reeks of hypocrisy. The UAW bureaucracy has collaborated in the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs since the 1970s, long before NAFTA. Throughout the 1980s, the UAW promoted nationalism as it collaborated in plant closures and wage cuts. Not a single job was "saved" on this basis.

The 2023 "stand-up strikes" at the Big Three auto companies were theatrical stunts that forced most workers to remain on the job. The final contracts failed to meet our core demands and opened the door to job cuts. For his role in selling out the strike, Fain took home more than \$274,000 last year.

The UAW bureaucracy is not merely promoting nationalism. It is embracing the logic of world war and the repression that comes with it. Trump's trade war is part of the escalating global war, which is at the same time a war on democratic rights at home. Students and others are being seized for deportation for opposing Israel's actions in Gaza—including former UAW member Mahmoud Khalil.

There is no section of the working class that benefits from economic nationalism. The auto industry is globally integrated. Parts and vehicles are produced across a vast interconnected supply chain by workers in the U.S., Mexico, Canada, Europe, China, South Korea, Japan, and elsewhere.

Nationalism subordinates the working class to the profit interests of the capitalist class. This is the same

poison used by Trump to attack immigrants, and its logic is war and the sacrifice of workers and their children for the interests of the rich.

Workers in the U.S. must reject the lie that we can only save our jobs at the expense of workers in other countries. We can only defend our interests by uniting with our class brothers and sisters throughout the world.

That's why I urge autoworkers to form rank-and-file committees in every plant and to join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). The corporations are globally coordinated. We must be too.

We don't need a trade war. We don't need nationalism. We need a new strategy: internationalism and socialism. Not backing the nationalist competition between different corporations, but creating a society based on genuine equality, in which the global economy is controlled by the workers and for the workers.



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