

Will Lehman's UAW campaign wins broad support from workers, as DSA unleashes slanders

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The launch of Will Lehman's campaign for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) is a political event of major significance for the entire working class. Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker, is running to organize a rebellion of the rank and file against a parasitic bureaucracy that has transformed the UAW into an instrument of management and the state.

Lehman's platform centers on transferring power from the apparatus to workers on the shop floor through a network of rank-and-file committees, ending corporatist collaboration, opposing nationalist poison that pits workers against each other across borders, and mobilizing workers' industrial power in defense of democratic rights and against war.

The initial campaign video, published on Lehman's website, WillforUAWPresident.org, has been viewed hundreds of thousands of times, and the campaign has received messages of support from workers across industries and countries.

It is precisely this response that has provoked a frantic, malicious attack against Lehman's campaign from the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which is a faction of the Democratic Party.

In a particularly revealing statement posted on X, Honda Wang, a member of the DSA's National Labor Commission Steering Committee, wrote, responding to Lehman's campaign video: "stop falling for these insane union busting weirdos ... they send people to picket lines to tell workers to stop paying dues, decertify from their union, and form committees with their party instead ... seems like pretty clear union-busting behavior to me."

Ignoring all the issues Lehman raises—including fighting for wages that restore past losses, a zero-layoff

policy, company-paid healthcare, and the 30-hour week with no loss of pay; uniting workers across borders against nationalist chauvinism; and mobilizing workers' industrial power to defend democratic rights and oppose war—Wang fixates on the question of dues. This is telling, because it goes to what is, for the union apparatus, the heart of the matter: the income of the bureaucracy.

As a factual matter, Lehman does not call on UAW members to "stop paying dues." Wang nonetheless raises the specter of workers doing so because he speaks as an apparatchik—furious at the possibility that the automatic flow of money from workers to a bureaucracy that exists to police them and enforce concessions could come under threat.

Workers, however, should have every right to decide whether they will fund an organization that claims to represent them. If workers believe a union is fighting for their interests—waging a real struggle against layoffs, speedup and concessions—they will pay dues willingly.

Historically, socialists and rank-and-file militants viewed the automatic dues checkoff with deep suspicion because it strengthened the bureaucracy's independence from the workers it claims to represent. The employer deducts dues from workers' paychecks and remits them automatically, insulating the apparatus from the active, democratic consent of the rank and file and tying the union institutionally to management as the dues collector.

The checkoff was massively expanded during World War II as part of a broader corporatist bargain. The unions, including the UAW, enforced the wartime no-strike pledge and participated in joint production

arrangements aimed at suppressing wages and increasing output, while employers guaranteed the uninterrupted flow of dues. This helped facilitate the consolidation of a pro-capitalist union bureaucracy.

When Wang and the DSA raise the prospect of an end of automatic dues payments, what they are defending is precisely what Lehman exposes in his campaign statement: a massive financial apparatus built on workers' dues money, hoarded by a stratum of upper middle class executives. As Lehman explains, "As it is presently constituted, the UAW is a union in name only. It functions to isolate us, discipline us, and protect the interests of a privileged bureaucracy that is in bed with the companies and the government."

Lehman notes that the UAW holds \$1.1 billion in assets, employs around 1,000 people and pays nearly 470 officials more than \$100,000 a year, with UAW President Shawn Fain at \$270,000, Secretary-Treasurer Margaret Mock at \$247,000, vice presidents averaging \$235,000 and regional directors averaging \$220,000. These officials, Lehman notes, "sit in the top 5 percent of income earners" and are insulated from the economic shocks confronting workers. Lehman also highlights the 500–600 "International Representatives" earning \$140,000 to \$160,000 to function as "high-paid industrial police," consuming "\$90 to \$100 million in payroll every year."

With the installation of Shawn Fain in 2023, in an election characterized by systematic voter suppression, the DSA and its periphery were brought directly into the top echelons of the UAW apparatus. The DSA and *Labor Notes*, both backed Fain and denounced Will Lehman's campaign, opposing his call for rank-and-file committees and the transfer of power to the shop floor while promoting the fraud that Fain would be a "reformer"—a lie that has been comprehensively exposed over the past three years.

They have been, and remain, well compensated for their services as advisers and functionaries of the bureaucracy. Fain's chief of staff, Chris Brooks—a DSA member and former *Labor Notes* writer—took home \$211,968 in 2024, while his assistant, Jonah Furman, also a *Labor Notes* alum, made \$175,318.

Wang's charge of "union busting" is the standard reflex of a privileged apparatus confronted with a rank-and-file challenge. For Wang and the forces he represents, the union *is* the apparatus. Workers are

merely objects to be managed. That is why he equates the independent organization of workers to assert democratic control—over negotiations, strikes, communications and even over how their dues are collected and used—with "union busting."

The apparatus that the DSA is so ardently defending has presided over the systematic suppression of the class struggle for more than four decades.

Over this period, the strike—historically the most powerful weapon available to workers—all but disappeared from American life. In 1970, there were 381 major work stoppages involving 1,000 or more workers. By the 2010s, that number had collapsed to a handful per year. This did not happen because workers were satisfied. It happened because the trade union bureaucracy, over decades, smothered every impulse toward collective action, transforming the unions from organizations of struggle into instruments of labor discipline in the service of corporate management.

In the UAW elections, Lehman is running as the representative of the rank and file, and that is why his central pledge is treated as intolerable by the apparatus and its defenders. As Lehman states, "The truth is, this bureaucracy can't be reformed. It must be abolished. The union parasites who collaborate with management and the state must be removed, and the resources of the union must be taken out of their hands and placed under the democratic control of the rank and file."

Fain is the candidate of that apparatus, and his backers in the DSA defend him because their own positions and incomes are tied to the preservation of the bureaucracy and the suppression of the class struggle.



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