

Will Lehman backs plant occupations by Mexican auto parts workers against mass layoffs

Our reporters
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Will Lehman, Mack Trucks worker and candidate for United Auto Workers president, has issued a statement supporting the Mexican auto parts workers who are occupying factories across northern Mexico to stop mass layoffs and defend their livelihoods against US-based corporations.

The occupations were sparked by the shutdown of six First Brands maquiladora plants and the firing of more than 4,000 workers. On January 28, employees were informed of an “orderly, accelerated shutdown” of major North American operations, including the wind-down of Brake Parts Inc. (BPI), Cardone and AutoLite business units. Thousands of families have been thrown into crisis.

In response, workers have taken control of their workplaces to prevent the removal of machinery and the permanent destruction of their jobs.

In his statement, Lehman declared, “I salute the courageous factory occupations spreading across northern Mexico, where workers are taking collective action to stop mass layoffs and defend their livelihoods against US-based corporations.”

He emphasized that these occupations were initiated independently of the official union apparatus, reflecting deep anger over a jobs massacre driven by corporate restructuring and financial speculation.

Lehman drew a direct parallel to the 1936–37 sit-down strikes in Flint, Michigan, where autoworkers seized General Motors plants to prevent the removal of machinery and to win union recognition.

“Like the Flint sit-down strikers 90 years ago,” Lehman wrote, “they are defending their jobs at the point of production.”

He said the occupations demolish the lie constantly

promoted by the UAW bureaucracy—that Mexican workers are passive, that they accept substandard conditions to “steal” American jobs. In reality, Lehman stressed, Mexican and American workers are exploited by the same transnational corporations and face the same layoffs, speedup and blackmail.

The auto industry operates as an integrated global system. Corporations such as General Motors, Stellantis and Ford Motor Company shift production wherever labor is cheapest. Major suppliers—including Lear Corporation, Dana Incorporated, American Axle & Manufacturing and Magna International—span Mexico, the United States and Canada, using wage differentials to drive down standards everywhere.

First Brands itself operates across the continent. Brake Parts Inc. has been recognized as a GM Supplier of the Year, underscoring its importance to North American supply chains.

“It is within this integrated system that Mexican workers are taking a stand,” Lehman noted. “The conclusion is clear: layoffs cannot be fought within national boundaries. The struggle must be international.”

He recalled the powerful demonstrations of cross-border solidarity in 2019, when workers at GM’s Silao plant refused to undermine the US auto strike and tens of thousands of maquiladora workers in Matamoros launched wildcat strikes. Rank-and-file workers in the United States responded with donations and messages of support.

“Once workers know about each other’s struggles, unity across borders is the most natural response,” Lehman said.

The nationalism of the UAW bureaucracy

Lehman sharply criticized UAW President Shawn Fain for backing Trump's tariffs and trade war measures and repeating the lie that destroying jobs in Mexico and Canada will benefit US workers.

"This is a fraud," Lehman stated. "Workers do not gain when jobs are destroyed abroad. The same corporations slashing jobs in Mexico are slashing them here."

In 2025 alone, more than 1.2 million layoffs were announced in the United States as corporations accelerated automation and AI-driven restructuring to boost profits. Most recently, GM eliminated 1,100 jobs at its Factory Zero plant in Detroit without meaningful opposition from the union apparatus.

Nationalism, Lehman argued, divides workers while corporations enrich themselves. The same politics used to blame Mexican workers for layoffs fuels repression at home.

He pointed to the deployment of ICE agents to Minneapolis and other cities, including outside Amazon and GM plants in the Detroit area, as part of a broader strategy to intimidate the working class. Immigrant workers are targeted first, but the aim is to suppress unified resistance.

"An attack on immigrants is an attack on all workers," Lehman declared.

For rank-and-file unity across borders

Lehman called on autoworkers to use their collective economic strength—including strike action—to defend immigrant workers and demand the removal of ICE from every city, the dismantling of these agencies, the release of detainees and the prosecution of those who violate democratic rights.

He insisted that the fight against layoffs and the fight against repression are inseparable. "The same corporate interests closing plants promote chauvinism and expand

state power to defend profits."

To oppose this, he argued that workers in the United States, Mexico and Canada must build direct unity from below by forming rank-and-file committees in every plant, linking them across borders, sharing information in real time and preparing coordinated action.

Lehman stressed that this is the purpose of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which seeks to coordinate a continent-wide fight for no layoffs, no plant closures, full employment, decent wages and democratic rights for all.

He concluded by calling on workers to reject the class-collaborationist policies of the UAW bureaucracy and to take up the class struggle independently.

"I am running for UAW president to build a movement that will abolish the pro-corporate and nationalist apparatus and transfer power to workers on the shop floor through democratically controlled rank-and-file committees," Lehman wrote.

"If we remain divided, we will be driven into a race to the bottom. If we unite across borders and build our own organizations of struggle, we can defend every job and fight for a future based on human need, not corporate profit."

"The way forward," he concluded, "is international unity through the expansion of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees."



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