

Strong support at Ford Rouge for rank-and-file campaign of Will Lehman for UAW president

Our reporters
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The campaign by Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman for president of the United Auto Workers is winning strong support from Ford workers at the historic Rouge Complex in Dearborn, Michigan, just west of Detroit. Supporters distributed hundreds of copies of Lehman's campaign announcement during a shift change at the Dearborn Truck Plant Tuesday and spoke with workers about the major issues they confront.

Dozens of workers stopped to speak with campaigners, voicing frustration with unbearable workloads, forced overtime, harassment, and indifference from UAW reps who "side with management." Another major topic of discussion was the reinstatement of DTP worker Thomas "TJ" Sabula who had been terminated on the spot for denouncing Trump as a "pedophile protector" during the president's tour of the plant on January 13.

Hundreds of workers at the plant defied management and posted videos of Sabula's confrontation with Trump. Within hours, those clips traveled across the world, sparking a wave of solidarity.

"Just seeing how fast that situation with Sabula became world news was the most sobering part," one worker told Lehman's supporters as he arrived for work. "It can happen anywhere—all of a sudden it was worldwide. Bill Ford Jr. and the plant manager pointed at him and made it known that he was terminated for good."

Last week, UAW President Shawn Fain and UAW Ford Vice President Laura Dickerson attempted to take credit for Sabula's reinstatement in comments at the UAW Community Action Program (CAP) conference in Washington, D.C. Their claims only provoked anger among workers.

"The UAW is trying to take credit for getting his job back. But they did nothing," another worker told Lehman's supporters. "Rank-and-file workers launched the GoFundMe drives that raised over \$800,000 in a matter of days."

"Workers are terminated every day on bogus charges, and the union doesn't do anything," another worker said. "Trump is the one that's lying. If he was innocent, he would never have reacted that way. It only shows how he feels about workers. Trump is very rude and disrespectful." She continued, "The things he is doing and saying are inexcusable. ...TJ was speaking facts, and there was a lot of support for him."

"Workers are unjustly fired every day, and the union does nothing," another worker said bluntly. Another added, "They've got legacy (senior) workers doing jobs they can't physically handle. Management piles on the work trying to force them out the door. I know at least three people who were fired for nothing. Management just wanted them gone."

Now, one worker told the WSWs that "they are outlawing phones at Rouge. Threatening workers with firing. They are avenging the humiliation of backing down on Sabulla in front of Trump."

On February 15, the Ford Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued a statement, titled, "Thomas 'TJ' Sabula Is Back at Work—But the Lessons Must Be Learned."

The committee said his reinstatement was not due to any action by the UAW bureaucracy but the outpouring of popular support from working people across the US and the world who agreed with Sabula's comment and defended his right to free speech.

While welcoming the courageous worker's return,

the committee said, “there is no place for complacency.”

What happened in Minneapolis—the repression of protests, the targeting of immigrants and the murder of political opponents—shows that Trump is moving to install a dictatorship. Immigrants were the first targets. But attacks on democratic rights will not stop there. The methods used against immigrants today are being prepared to use against striking workers tomorrow.

That is why workers have to build rank-and-file committees in every factory and workplace, controlled not by union bureaucrats but workers themselves, the committee said. The committees must oppose the program of class collaboration of UAW President Shawn Fain and the rest of the union apparatus and revive the rich traditions of class struggle.

The Ford Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee expressed its support for Lehman’s campaign, his call to abolish the corrupt UAW bureaucracy and transfer power to workers on the shop floor, and his fight for the international unity of workers and independence from both corporate-controlled parties.

Ford workers also spoke to campaigners about Lehman’s call for collective action to stop the operations of Trump’s ICE paramilitary squads in Detroit and other cities. The day before the campaign at Ford Rouge, Detroit residents spotted masked ICE agents detaining motorists outside of the General Motors Factory Zero plant, located in the heavily immigrant community of Hamtramck, a Detroit enclave.

“The ICE raids are disgusting,” a Ford worker declared. “First off, how can they claim that any immigrant who is detained is criminal? That is just not true. You have more innocent people and more parents being taken away from their children than anything. How can they take a five-year-old kid? That’s not right.

“When people come to the United States, there’s supposed to be in the land of the free. They feel like they are here to get something better than they have at

home. ICE are not even doing the paperwork. They’re picking up people at work, and they are literally just killing people. I know our ancestors would not be proud of this today.”

Lehman supporters encountered these same sentiments in other Detroit factories where campaigns were held this week, including the Stellantis Sterling Heights, Mack and Jefferson assembly plants.

At Jefferson, one young worker said, “It’s a terrible thing that ICE is here because we have communities and minorities from all over, from all over the world. You have Dearborn, Hamtramck and they’re ripping these people away from their kids and killing American citizens on top of that. This is America, man? We’re killing our own people. It’s nothing but a slaughterhouse. They start with the immigrants, but they’re going after everybody.” Asked what he thought about a general strike, he said, “I’m all for it.”

The worker expressed support for Will’s campaign and said he wanted to get involved. “The union being in bed with management is frustrating. You figure that you have people that fight for you, and they’re really in the pockets of management and do these back door deals. There needs to be a change. I agree, workers should be controlling everything. It’s true.”

Another Jefferson worker stopped after taking a flyer on Lehman’s campaign. “Is this the guy who ran the last time? We were just talking about him,” she said before signing up to support the campaign.



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