

UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman denounces police attack on Quakertown, Pennsylvania student protest against ICE

Our reporters
22 February 2026

Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and candidate for president of the United Auto Workers, has issued a statement condemning the police assault on high school students in Quakertown who walked out of class last week to protest Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and detentions.

“I unequivocally condemn the vicious assault carried out by the Quakertown, Pennsylvania police and school authorities against high school students who courageously walked out to oppose the immigration Gestapo and the nationwide raids terrorizing immigrant families,” Lehman declared in a statement posted on his website, WillforUAWPresident.org. “What took place was an attack on youth exercising their democratic rights, which every worker must oppose.”

On February 20, several dozen students at Quakertown Community High School left school and marched in cold rain to protest ongoing ICE raids targeting immigrant families. Video circulating widely on social media shows Scott McElree, the borough’s police chief, grabbing students and placing at least one teenage girl in a chokehold. Another officer is seen throwing a student into a planter. Five youth and one adult were reportedly arrested.

“This was, plain and simple, police brutality against children,” Lehman said. In response to the attack, thousands have signed petitions demanding the resignation of the police chief.

The police violence in Quakertown is part of a broader pattern. Across the United States, students have been suspended, criminalized and intimidated for protesting ICE deportations, including cases involving classmates or family members who have been detained or disappeared.

Lehman connected the assault to the wider crackdown on dissent under the Trump administration’s escalating immigration offensive. “Children cannot learn while living in terror,” he stated. “Authorities are targeting youth because they understand that young people can inspire workers to stand up and use our social and economic strength to oppose dictatorship and stop Trump’s war against the working class.”

Quakertown is located roughly 30 minutes from the Mack-Volvo plant in Macungie, where Lehman works, and from which he is mounting his campaign for UAW president. He emphasized that the struggle of immigrant families and the defense of democratic rights are inseparable from the fight of autoworkers and the broader working class.

“Our immigrant brothers and sisters work alongside us and their kids go to school with our kids,” Lehman said. “We must stand shoulder to shoulder just like we need to do at work. An injury to one is an injury to all.”

Lehman also invoked the town’s history. Just over a mile from the high school, freedom seekers once passed through Quakertown on the Underground Railroad. Local abolitionists, including Quaker families, defied the Fugitive Slave Act by opening their homes as safe houses.

“Then, as now, the law was invoked to justify the pursuit of working-class people whose only ‘crime’ was seeking freedom and a better life,” Lehman stated. “The slavecatchers of that era and the thugs of ICE today serve the same reactionary purposes.”

In a letter posted Sunday, the Quakertown Community School District presents itself as a neutral arbiter concerned only with “safety,” while distancing itself from the arrests and brutal assault carried out by

local police. Yet the letter confirms that administrators coordinated with law enforcement in advance, requested police presence for the walkout, and will again have police on site when students return to school.

After video showed the police chief placing a teenage girl in a chokehold and officers violently seizing students, the district's priority is not to defend students' democratic rights but to reassure parents that law enforcement will maintain order. By emphasizing that students who left campus were "no longer under the district's custodial control," the administration attempts to wash its hands of responsibility while deepening collaboration with the same authorities that brutalized them.

Lehman urged workers to demand that all charges against the Quakertown students and their supporters be dropped immediately and that they be returned to their classrooms with no disciplinary measures. He added, "all those violating Constitutional rights, from the police to the Trump administration, must be held accountable."

Lehman's statement situates the defense of the Quakertown students within a broader strategy: the independent mobilization of the working class against the police-state apparatus and the bipartisan political establishment.

"Teachers, schoolworkers, unionized and non-union workers must form rank-and-file committees to respond to raids, arrests and suspensions," he said. "Only an organized working-class movement, acting independently of the pro-corporate union bureaucracies and both big business parties, can abolish ICE and dismantle the police-state apparatus."

This call aligns with Lehman's campaign platform, which centers on abolishing the UAW apparatus and transferring power to workers on the shop floor through democratically controlled rank-and-file committees.

The events in Quakertown have exposed not only the brutality of local police but the broader climate of repression facing youth and immigrant families. The violent response to a peaceful student protest demonstrates the fear within official circles of any movement that links the defense of immigrants to a wider working-class struggle.

The defense of democratic rights cannot be left to appeals to local officials or the courts. It requires the

conscious intervention of workers—organized independently and armed with a political perspective aimed at dismantling the structures of repression and capitalist exploitation at their root.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact