

More Canadian workers support Will Lehman's campaign for UAW presidency

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* continues to receive statements of support from workers across Canada for Will Lehman's campaign for the presidency of the United Autoworkers (UAW) in the United States. A rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker from Pennsylvania, Lehman is running on a socialist program to abolish the union bureaucracy and place power back in the hands of workers on the shop floor. To send in your statement of support, fill out the form at the end of this article.

The National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee (NSCRFC) was established at the National Steel Car plant in Hamilton, Ontario, in 2023. The NSCRFC's founding expressed the outrage among workers towards management and the United Steel Workers bureaucracy after the death of three workers on the job in the plant within 18 months. It fought during the last contract struggle in 2023, which culminated in a strike, for the workers to take matters into their own hands and appeal to workers throughout manufacturing and other industries to broaden their struggle into a fight for decent-paying, secure jobs for all.

Brothers and Sisters,

Something is going on within rank-and-file members of the United Autoworkers (UAW) in the United States. Something that is not only central to the ideological position of this committee, but an important step in the emancipation of workers from the shackles of the labour bureaucracies across the continent. A rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker from Macungie, Pennsylvania is running for UAW president. His name is Will Lehman, and his candidacy is certain to shake up the UAW establishment and frighten those union bureaucrats in other organizations who have got far too comfortable with the status quo of "labour/management partnerships." Lehman may be familiar to some of you, because he spoke at an online meeting we had during our strike in 2023.

This is not the first time Lehman has run as a candidate for UAW president. He ran in 2022 in the first election the UAW held that was a direct membership vote for the presidency of the union.

Some things need to be noted about that election. It was only held because of a massive bribery corruption scandal that saw several high-ranking UAW bureaucrats do prison time. The UAW had previously held elections that were delegate-based, ensuring the usual opportunist bureaucrats would get elected.

To ensure the leadership positions remained in "safe" hands, the 2022 election was subject to a massive voter suppression effort by the UAW bureaucracy, which failed to even inform the vast majority of members that an election was taking place. Out of 1.1 million eligible voters only 104,776 votes were cast. The Lehman campaign filed many legal challenges that were ultimately ruled in his favour, finding that the Biden administration's Department of Labour had acted "arbitrarily and capriciously" in dismissing his complaints. In spite of that, both the previous Biden administration and the current Trump regime sanctioned the vote.

In the 2022 election, Lehman received approximately 5,000 votes or about 5 percent of the ballots cast. This was a remarkable achievement for someone who ran openly as a socialist under conditions in which the word "socialist" has been vilified by the American ruling class and union bureaucrats for decades, and the UAW's systematic voter suppression campaign. In the intervening 4 years, the situation has changed and the consciousness of workers has increased politically. Conditions are even more ripe today for Lehman's program to win a broad hearing, not just among autoworkers and university service workers represented by the UAW, but all workers across North America.

Lehman's campaign is based on 4 key principles:

1. To end the dictatorship of the UAW bureaucracy. That includes purging the union of parasitic bureaucrats, creating a network of rank-and-file committees, and transferring power and decision making from the pro-corporate apparatus to workers on the shop floor.

2. End the collaboration of the union with the corporations. This means ending the labour/management partnership and pro-corporate policies and replacing them with a strategy of class struggle. This has been long overdue in not only the UAW but in the USW as well. Lehman's program calls for wages that fully recover losses caused by past concessions and inflation, a zero-layoff policy, health insurance at the employer's expense, and the historic demand for a 30-hour work week with no loss in pay.

3. The repudiation of the chauvinism and nationalism of the UAW bureaucracy. This goes to the disgusting flag waving that took place on both sides of the border during the 2023 autoworkers strike, not to mention the more than 40 years of Canadian and American chauvinism spewed out by the UAW and CAW/Unifor bureaucracies since the nationalist split of 1985.

For the first time in 25 years, contracts on both sides of the border were up simultaneously. However, both the UAW under Fain and Unifor under Lana Payne did absolutely nothing to collaborate and put forward a united strategy that would have benefitted autoworkers on both sides of the border. On the contrary, Payne openly revelled in her pursuit of a "Canadian course" in the negotiations. She ensured Unifor could better whipsaw jobs and conditions back and forth across the border by agreeing to a three-year contract instead of the traditional four-year agreements. The result is that this year's round of bargaining for Unifor members takes place a year ahead of their class brothers and sisters in the United States.

No automobile belongs to any one particular country as parts cross borders multiple times before an automobile is finally constructed. What happened was isolation of walkouts and, in the final analysis, disastrous results, including layoffs and plant closures, while the automakers made record profits. To quote Lehman, "Workers have nothing to gain from a trade war, which amounts to a struggle between capitalists for control of markets and a greater share of profits gained through exploitation of the working class. What we need is an international strategy based on the unified struggle of American, Canadian, and Mexican workers against

international corporations.”

This is extremely pertinent for us here at National Steel Car as it relates to the tariff issue and how it threatens our employment, not only in rail car production but steel production as a whole in Canada. We’ve made statements opposing the USW’s nationalist strategy and tariffs in response to Trump’s trade war.

Lehman’s opposition to nationalism and call for international class unity also goes to how the USW sold out our strike in 2023 by doing nothing to broaden our struggle to Wabtec workers in Erie, Pennsylvania, who were on strike at the same time. Wabtec makes brake parts used in our truck and axle shop. We don’t have to wonder what the USW bureaucracy has in store for us when our contract is up on August 6 of this year. We’ve seen its nationalist, anti-worker playbook time after time.

4. Calling for the mobilization of the industrial and political power of the workers to defend democratic rights and oppose war.

This point is extremely important as we see governments around the world waging war, whether it be Trump and the US against Iran or the entire NATO alliance, Canada included, against Russia in Ukraine. The ruling class in every country is making us pay for these wars and the massive rearmament programs that go along with them through wage and benefit cuts, attacks on our conditions, and the gutting of public services that we and our families depend upon. Our ability to speak out and fight back is being squelched through strike bans, like against the postal workers, dockers, and rail workers, as imperialist plunder and mass killing unfolds with no principled voices of protest being raised within the political establishment. The ruling class, through its legislative operatives, cannot tolerate any dissent from those they deem expendable. It’s why concentration camps are being constructed in the US to detain immigrants, one of the most oppressed sections of the working class.

Lehman’s campaign can start the ball rolling towards removing these pro-capitalist and nationalist bureaucracies once and for all and building democratic organizations of rank-and-file workers power and class struggle. And because of that, the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee fully endorses Will Lehman’s campaign for UAW president.

You can read more about the campaign here or watch this video interview with Lehman.

A worker from the Canada Revenue Agency sent the following message of support for Lehman’s campaign,

My name is Erik, a mailroom worker with the Canada Revenue Agency. I strongly support Will Lehman’s bid for UAW president because Will is the only candidate who understands the needs of the rank-and-file; which are to break away from the union bureaucracy, put control into the hands of workers on the shop floor and connect the struggle between workers on an international level. Workers will never receive the respect or the dignity they deserve so long as their conditions are managed by bureaucrats who are divorced from the realities of working class life.

He explained that workers across the public service confront the impending prospect of losing their jobs as the Liberal government led by former central banker Mark Carney cuts up to 40,000 jobs to pay for war and the enrichment of the financial oligarchy. Under these conditions, he feels that the Public Service Association of Canada (PSAC), the bargaining agent for many public sector workers, is leading workers to defeat. He remarked on a PSAC union update in January,

The PSAC union update calls for workers to ‘stay tuned.’ They outline serious issues, but offer no way forward, except for empty

phrases. What are we waiting for? ‘Stay tuned’ for what? The PSAC is totally dropping the ball, and at this point it has got to be intentional. The PSAC is trying to distract us from what’s really going on, buying time until it’s too late for workers to do anything about the impending changes.

We’re falling behind on public health with COVID and local measles outbreaks, and the resources to protect society are being redirected towards the military and war. We see the drive for war and profit manifest itself in the worst way possible with the murder of Alex Prettin in Minneapolis, Renée Good before him, and ICE violence in American streets. Now with the empire crumbling, America is using the tactics they used abroad at home. Ask an Iraqi or Afghani about the practices and policies implemented by Trump, and they’ll recognize this type of violence right away for what it is—aggressive urban warfare directed from the White House.

In Quebec, workers across the public sector and in private industry confront a massive onslaught on their working and living conditions. The Quebec chauvinist Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) government has enforced sweeping austerity measures over recent years and offered billions in handouts to big business. Ahead of this year’s provincial election, it appears set to be replaced by the far-right Parti Québécois, a party with close ties to the province’s union bureaucracy that advocates Quebec separatism. An educator from the Montreal area made clear in his message to the WSW that he views Lehman’s campaign as a powerful pole of resistance to this sharp lurch to the right. He wrote:

My name is Laurent and I am a special needs educator working in the education sector in Québec. Although I am not a member of the UAW, I would like to express my wholehearted support for Will Lehman as a candidate for the office of UAW President. I support his call to overthrow the union bureaucracy and return power to the rank-and-file workers. It is we who generate all the wealth that the wealthy business owners and shareholders appropriate for themselves, yet receive only a meagre pittance in return.

For decades, workers have watched their wages and working conditions deteriorate ever further, while the rich swim in wealth. This process has only been made possible through the complicity of trade union apparatuses such as the UAW. The union bureaucrats have enriched themselves personally and are now an integral part of the establishment. They are hostile to the struggles of the autoworkers and to the class struggle in the broader sense. The era in which national unions could wage struggles for modest improvements for workers is over. Today, the union leaders have very direct material interests in the capitalist system. They regard us as cattle to be exploited, as a labour force to be haggled over. And for every concession imposed in contracts, they receive their share of the spoils.

Rejecting the systematic drive by the ruling class to pit Canadian workers against their American brothers and sisters, and the promotion of Quebec separatism on the basis of linguistic differences and Quebec chauvinism, Laurent continued,

The union leaders have shifted so far to the right politically that some of them—led by none other than Shawn Fain—are working

hand in hand with the would-be fascist dictator Trump. They support his trade war against Canada and the world. Do not fall into this trap that divides us—the workers have no interest in this trade war!

Our struggle is an international struggle, comrades! We workers in Quebec and Canada are waging the same struggle as you: against crumbling public services, governments of and for the financial oligarchy, attacks on democratic rights, wages below the rate of inflation, and the threat of a world war. Our trade unions are just as corrupt as yours. In Quebec, for example, two years ago they sabotaged the struggle of public sector workers, even though we had strong support among the population. The trade unions are preparing to back the pro-independence Parti Québécois in the next elections: an ultra-nationalist party that promotes Quebec separatism, pursues far-right policies, attacks immigrants and courts Trump.

To this we must say: Enough is enough! The trade union bureaucracy is incapable of defending our interests. Worse still, it collaborates with the state and employers against us. So let's kick them out and create new bodies by and for the workers. Forward with the rank-and-file committees! Vote for Will, the only candidate fighting to help you reclaim power in the workplace. The only one fighting for the unity of all workers to bring about real change and achieve the social equality we deserve!



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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