

# Turkish municipal workers support Will Lehman's UAW presidential campaign

**Our reporters**  
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Will Lehman, a rank-and-file worker at the Mack Trucks plant in Pennsylvania, US, announced his candidacy for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) elections earlier this year. His campaign is based on the abolishing of union bureaucracy and the transfer of power to the rank and file, grounded in an international socialist program. As a leading member of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), Lehman's campaign addresses not only American auto workers but workers globally, advancing an international strategy.

Lehman, who closely follows class struggles in Türkiye, issued a statement protesting the arrest last month of Mehmet Türkmen, chairman of the independent rank-and-file textile union B?RTEK-SEN. He also declared his support for the wildcat strike by Polyak coal miners in Izmir.

During his first UAW presidential campaign in 2022, Lehman gave an interview to Mukavemet TV, a YouTube channel broadcasting from Türkiye.

The WSWs has received messages of support for Lehman's campaign from workers at the Kad?köy, Maltepe, and ?i?li municipalities in Istanbul, a city of 16 million.

A worker from ?i?li Municipality wrote:

Will Lehman's candidacy for UAW president, amid the US-Israeli war on Iran, the Gaza genocide, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, US imperialist intervention in Venezuela, escalating tensions around the world and Trump's drive to establish a dictatorship, is of utmost importance.

His campaign aims to be the voice of the working class amid the crisis manifested in these developments. The ruling classes everywhere are once again seeking to make workers bear the cost of the crisis and the wars. The union bureaucracies have lined up behind the ruling class. Whether they define themselves as close to the current Erdo?an regime or as opposition, all union confederations are collaborating with the corporations to erode workers' economic and social rights.

The union bureaucracies resort to this path to protect their dues and increase their wealth. While union bureaucrats grow richer by the day and sink into corruption, workers continue to impoverish.

As workers in Türkiye, we know very well that Lehman's campaign is a call to all workers worldwide. Moreover, as seen in the struggles of Polyak miners, Migros warehouse workers, and others in Türkiye, rank-and-file workers' actions are developing against the union bureaucracies in many places.

The working class is creating its own organizations in struggle. However, they must unite with the international working class on the basis of a correct perspective.

Lehman's campaign lays out precisely the method and aims of such a struggle. In declaring our solidarity with this campaign, we call on all our worker comrades to discuss his campaign in their workplaces and contact us by forming independent rank-and-file committees.

Kadim F?rat, a worker at Kad?köy Municipality, stated in his solidarity message:

I am following your candidacy for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) with great interest. I also had the chance to follow your campaign in 2022. I hope these campaigns for the working class grow to herald our escape from class society.

The crisis of the capitalist system, which is leading to an ever-greater depression, has reached such dimensions that it is dragging humanity, nature and other species to the edge of the abyss.

There is no alternative for the world working class other than saying "stop" to this trajectory. The institutions run by those driving the world into war can only deepen this crisis. There is no reason to trust them. Our only hope lies in the working class and the oppressed uniting their struggles for a life beyond capitalism.

I find the themes Lehman highlight in his campaign extremely important: ending the dictatorship of the union bureaucracy, building a network of rank-and-file committees to ensure workers not corporations have the final say, reversing past worker losses, ending layoffs, companies paying for health insurance, a 30-hour workweek, rejecting racism and nationalism that normalize war provocation dividing the working class, and mobilizing the full power from production of workers to defend democratic rights and oppose war. The problems you list are the common problems of all workers worldwide.

As a municipal worker, I can say that the problems faced by the Turkish working class are similar. They include high inflation, high rent and food prices, wage suppression, declining purchasing power, precarious, flexible and long working hours and restrictions on public services and

investments. All economic resources are being funneled to a handful of the rich, while workers get widespread layoffs, horrific unemployment, and cuts to pensions and wages. We have chillingly low unionization rates, postponed strikes, bourgeois political parties in all camps constantly robbing the working class and never caring about workers, and union bureaucrats never raising their voice against this hellish picture for workers, blocking militant workers. These are among our most important problems.

However, despite all these hardships, the working class refuses to give up the fight or abandon solidarity. In recent years, there has been a clear increase in workers' actions, wildcat struggles, and strikes. The workers' movement is not yet at a level to repel the policies of the ruling classes. But something is fermenting.

In Türkiye, I want to emphasize a few fundamental points that class-conscious workers struggling within the working class focus on intently: fighting against the ideological hegemony of capitalist parties and the policies of union bureaucrats who have become their appendages, developing rank-and-file organization in workplaces, ensuring workplaces are controlled by workers, and building a united workers' front to strengthen workers' unity and power—these are among our basic tasks.

Our problems and our path towards liberation are the same.

I send my greetings to you and your working-class comrades on this meaningful path you have embarked upon.

As someone who holds to the proposition that “The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves,” I greet every struggle undertaken from within the working class with infinite respect.

Workers of the world, unite!

In his message, a worker from Maltepe Municipality said: “It is no longer sustainable for the organizations that should be amplifying the voices of workers to operate in isolation from them, based on top-down decisions. For unions to become genuine representative mechanisms, the floor and final say must belong directly to the workers. Therefore, strengthening candidacies rising from the rank-and-file and the struggle for independent representation is critical. We stand with Will Lehman, who embodies the workers' own will, and invite all workers and laborers to support this campaign.”

Another worker from ?i?li Municipality expressed his support for Lehman's campaign as follows:

We send greetings from Turkish workers to our brother Will Lehman and, through him, to the militant workers in America.

Today, the world is shaking under capitalism's deepening crises, war policies, the exploitation system, mass layoffs, and multifaceted assaults on the gains of working class. While capital organizes on an international scale, it has become a historic necessity for the working class to organize its future not confined to the narrowness of national borders, but on a united, conscious, and internationalist basis. Therefore, every rank-and-file initiative rising against the union bureaucracy and its pro-corporate conciliationism, as well as all structures paralyzing workers' will, carries great importance not only for

its own country but for the common future of the world working class.

The perspective for rank-and-file committees advocated by Will Lehman is extremely significant. The real power of the working class lies not in top-down bureaucratic mechanisms but in self-organization where workers directly exercise the right to speak, decide, and control. Rank-and-file committees are not only tools of today's struggles but also the seeds of workers' democracy, class initiative, and collective will that will define the character of socialism in the new century. The working class becomes a true subject on the historical stage only when it enters with its own independent line, its own organizations, and its own perspective for power.

The experiences of the past century have made clear that wherever the bureaucracy takes the place of the class, the bond between ends and means is severed, and workers' direct participation is suppressed; retreat, degeneration, and defeat become inevitable. In contrast, every struggle rising based on the working class's own action, its own consciousness, and its own organizations lays the real foundation for society's future emancipation. That is why what is needed today is for workers not merely to be a “support base” but to become the constructive force of history and the decisive subject of social transformation.

As workers in Türkiye, we do not see the struggle waged by our class brothers and sisters in America as separate from our own. The unity, integrity, and international solidarity of the class is not a wish for us but a vital principle. With this understanding, we salute Will Lehman's campaign based on rank-and-file will, workers' democracy, and international class solidarity; we consider it our duty to tell this exemplary stance to workers and laborers in Türkiye, our friends, and immigrant worker brothers and sisters living in America.

The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself. Workers should have the right to speak and make decisions. Power must be transferred to the rank-and-file. Long live international workers' solidarity! Long live the unity of the working class and the struggle for socialism!



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