

May Day 2026

# Rank-and-file rebellion and the unity of the working class

**Will Lehman**  
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*This speech was delivered by Will Lehman, candidate for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and member of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), at the 2026 May Day Online Rally, organized by the WSWs and the International Committee of the Fourth International.*

To our brothers and sisters all over the world, I bring you revolutionary greetings on behalf of the American working class. My name is Will Lehman. I work at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and I am running for president of the United Auto Workers to take power back from the corrupt union apparatus and put it on the shop floor where it belongs. I am standing in this election for an even more important reason: to unite workers in common struggle. We workers of the world are already united by the global forces of production.

What we have to do right now, starting today, is unite as a conscious fighting force. We can't accept any of the divisions the capitalists put on us—whether by race, religion, or nationality. American workers are moving in a struggle by the tens of thousands—and it will soon be by the hundreds of thousands and then millions. Already this year, 15,000 nurses in New York City struck for nearly a month. 31,000 Kaiser nurses walked out in California and Hawaii. San Francisco teachers launched their first strike since 1979. Harvard graduate workers walked off indefinitely. In Michigan, 1,300 Nexteer auto parts workers rejected the UAW's concessions contract by 96 percent, only to be kept on the job while officials extended it behind their backs.

In Los Angeles, 80,000 workers were ready to strike when their unions sold them out at the last minute. At every turn, the bureaucracies strangle our resistance.

Strikes called off, sellout contracts forced through, and always the same message: accept this bad deal, it's the most you can hope for.

The problem is not this or that union leader. It's the pro-corporate union bureaucracy itself. There are plenty of so-called "union reformists." The left-talkers say all we can do as workers is pressure the unions and hope for better bureaucrats. They mean themselves! But no sooner do they get into power than they act like the corrupt officials they replaced. UAW President Shawn Fain came in promising change and delivered backroom deals and phony strikes. UAW bureaucrat Brandon Mancilla, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, ordered Columbia UAW graduate workers to scrap demands protecting immigrant workers.

The Teamsters for a Democratic Union in the Teamsters and the New Directions group in the UAW are fully integrated into the union machinery that is robbing workers and collaborating with Trump. The answer is not new names and faces in the bureaucracy. The answer is rank-and-file rebellion—workers rebuilding our own organizations, independent of union officials who serve management and the government. This means rank-and-file committees of the workers, by the workers and for the workers to abolish the apparatus and transfer power to the shop floor. We have to revive the old solidarity traditions of the working class that have been buried by the union bureaucracies. An injury to one is an injury to all. As we speak, workers and socialists are imprisoned worldwide for fighting for our class.

In Ukraine, Bogdan Syrotiuk, a 26-year-old Trotskyist, faces 15 years to life on false treason

charges. His only crime was opposing the NATO proxy war and calling for the unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers—the same workers now killing each other in the trenches. In Turkey, independent union leaders Ba?aran Aksu and Mehmet Türkmen have been arrested by the Erdo?an government and over 110 Turkish coal miners who walked 180 kilometers demanding unpaid wages were detained by police.

In India, 13 Maruti Suzuki autoworkers remain imprisoned on frame-up murder charges for organizing against sweatshop conditions, locked up for over a decade. I demand the immediate release of Bogdan Syrotiuk, the Maruti Suzuki workers, Ba?aran Aksu, Mehmet Türkmen, and all class war prisoners. Their imprisonment is an attack on workers everywhere. And I demand an end to the persecution of immigrant workers.

Trump’s administration, backed by the Democrats, is rounding up our immigrant sisters and brothers—our coworkers, neighbors, and friends—in an attack on the whole working class. It is divide and conquer. Trump lied to American workers: he scapegoated immigrants and funneled profits to his billionaire cronies. He promised a manufacturing boom and we got factory shutdowns. He promised to defeat inflation and instead our paychecks buy less food, fuel, clothing and medicine every day.

We workers know that we can’t go on like this because we live it every day. War, inflation and price gouging mean our real pay is falling, even though we’re working harder than ever. AI and robotics, in the hands of the capitalists, won’t give us more time with our families at the same pay. They’ll be used for mass layoffs and more wealth for the top 1 percent. Meanwhile, the capitalists and their governments are dragging the whole world into dictatorship and war.

The bosses won’t be doing the fighting and dying. We will. So, what can we do? Two-hundred-and-fifty years ago, at the start of the American Revolution, an immigrant artisan worker in my state of Pennsylvania named Tom Paine wrote: “We have it in our power to begin the world over again.”

Brothers and sisters, we the workers of the world actually do have that power. We are the ones who build everything, move everything, feed and care for and teach everyone. I call on all workers to join and build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File

Committees (IWA-RFC) as the spearhead for a united movement of the working class across sectors and countries. The first thing we have to overcome is our own fear and hesitation. No one will do this but ourselves. Workers of the world, unite. We have nothing more to lose, and we have a world to win.



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