

# Will Lehman: 2026 UAW convention exposes “apparatus vs. the rank-and-file”

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As delegates prepared to nominate candidates for international office on the third day of the 2026 UAW Constitutional Convention in Detroit, Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker from Macungie, Pennsylvania and rank-and-file socialist candidate for UAW president, issued a statement charging that the proceedings had laid bare the gulf between the union bureaucracy and the membership it claims to represent.

“The events of the first two days of the 2026 UAW Constitutional Convention have made clear why my nomination is necessary,” Lehman wrote in the statement, posted on social media. “This is a convention of the bureaucracy, by the bureaucracy and for the bureaucracy.”

The statement followed two days in which the administration of UAW President Shawn Fain pushed through a series of constitutional amendments while sharply restricting debate from the floor. Of the roughly 100 resolutions submitted by local unions, the convention’s resolution committee advanced only a handful, while allowing all 35 resolutions introduced by the International Executive Board. New rules limited debate to one speaker for and one against per region.

The convention raised the salaries of top officers, with increases Lehman put at between \$10,000 and \$30,000 a year for each official. “While our brothers and sisters cannot pay their bills, the bureaucracy voted itself raises,” he wrote. “It is rewarding itself for the betrayals it has carried out.”

At the same time, Lehman charged, the apparatus moved to deny members a dues reduction they had anticipated for months. Under the existing constitution, dues were to fall from 2.5 hours of monthly pay to 2 hours once the strike fund crossed \$850 million. The fund crossed that threshold, but the reduction did not

follow. Instead, the convention raised the ceiling to \$1.3 billion. “The fund crossed the threshold. The promised reduction never came,” Lehman wrote. “At this convention, the apparatus simply moved the goalposts.” Meanwhile, he noted, strike pay would be increased by only \$50 a week.

Lehman argued that the convention’s tightly managed character was designed to head off opposition. “The whole event has been aimed at suppressing opposition to the bureaucracy that controls the UAW,” he wrote, contending that “there was not, in any meaningful sense, an actual agenda apart from what Solidarity House wished to ratify.”

He pointed in particular to the presence of former UAW President Ray Curry, whom Fain invited to the podium as a guest of honor. Curry was the incumbent Fain defeated in 2022, when Fain denounced him as part of an “old guard” that had “sold out members with tiers, concessions, and plant closures.” Lehman noted that Curry “has been welcomed back with open arms” and that “Curry’s people now sit on the slate alongside Fain’s.” This reconciliation, he argued, amounted to “the unity of the apparatus against the rank and file.”

According to Lehman, a series of disputes confronting the membership were kept off the convention floor. He cited the conflict at auto parts maker Nexteer, where workers rejected three contracts and authorized a strike by 86 percent but were directed by the International to remain on the job; the brief American Axle strike, which he said was shut down and then “repackaged as a victory”; large “no” votes by Dana workers on contracts backed by the UAW; and the 41-day strike by UAW academic workers at Harvard, which ended without a contract. None of these, he wrote, was subject to serious debate.

Lehman also raised workplace safety, citing UAW

members Antonio Gaston, Ronald Adams Sr. and Gregory Knopf, who died in unsafe conditions that the convention did not address. “The bureaucracy fears that any open accounting will detonate the rank-and-file opposition that has been building plant by plant, workplace by workplace, campus by campus,” he wrote.

His campaign, Lehman said, “is about transferring power from the bureaucracy to the rank and file” through “a network of rank-and-file committees in every workplace.” He directed an appeal to delegates as they prepared to vote on nominations: “When you go home, your members will ask you what you did in Detroit. Will you say that you voted to maintain full dues for workers making \$15 an hour while authorizing pay increases for the apparatus? Or will you say that you stood for building a popular rank-and-file movement to take back this union?”

Lehman said he had spoken with delegates “who are outraged by what has transpired here,” and urged them to “nominate me, and nominate any candidate who is willing to take a stand for the rank and file against the apparatus.”

Nominations for international office are scheduled to proceed as the convention continues.



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