Mack Trucks worker and socialist Will Lehman nominated for UAW president

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Rank-and-file socialist autoworker Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker from Macungie, Pennsylvania, was nominated for president of the United Auto Workers Wednesday at the union's Constitutional Convention in Detroit. He was nominated by two delegates, the maximum allowed.

Nominating Lehman were Matthew Wypyszinski, a delegate from UAW Local 1821 in Ocala, Florida at the Lockheed Martin facility, and Tamika Foster, chairperson for UAW Local 2145, representing Blue Cross Blue Shield workers in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Following his acceptance of the nomination, Lehman issued a statement, posted on his website, thanking the delegates who nominated him, the other delegates who had pledged to nominate him but were unable and the rank-and-file workers who attended the convention to campaign for him.

"This campaign is directed against that apparatus," Lehman said. "It is about the fight to transfer power from the bureaucracy that has dominated this union to the rank and file, to the workers on the shop floor."

Lehman added that the campaign "has never been about getting me into Solidarity House. It is about building a genuine rank-and-file movement, a movement that turns every factory into a citadel of resistance and carries the fight from the factories into the neighborhoods, the schools and every community where working people live and struggle."

He pointed to the developing rebellion of workers in the UAW, including the workers at Nexteer, who have rejected three UAW-backed contracts, and other parts suppliers. He told the WSWS that he had spoken to many delegates at the convention, including casino workers, healthcare workers, academic workers, legal aid and social workers, educators and other workers who are in the UAW, all of whom face the same issues.

The statement referred to the broader crisis in the working class.

> Inflation has gutted our wages, while corporate profits have hit record highs. War abroad is expanding, and it is being paid for by cuts at home. Democratic rights are being shredded, immigrants are being hunted down and deported, and the public services working people depend on are being dismantled. Hours are lengthening, retirement security has been hollowed out, and the speedup in the plants has reached a breaking point.

"The anger over all of this is enormous," Lehman said. "The desire to fight is everywhere. What it needs is organization and direction."

Lehman called for the development of "a network of committees, controlled by workers ourselves, that can break the grip of the apparatus and put our struggles back in our own hands."

The statement placed significant emphasis on the unification of workers throughout the world. Workers, Lehman wrote, "are fighting against the corporations, the bureaucracy that serves them, and the profit system that puts all of it above human need. This fight cannot stop at the plant gate or the national border. It must unite workers across every plant, every sector and every country."

It referred in particular to the need to unify workers in Mexico and Canada and pointed to the "heroic struggle waged by Turkish workers against corporate exploitation and the collusion of the union bureaucracy."

Lehman will face five other candidates: Shawn Fain, the sitting president who has presided over more than three years of sell-outs and betrayals; Rich Boyer, currently vice president in charge of Stellantis and independent parts suppliers, including Nexteer and American Axle;

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Stellantis worker Brian Keller; Greg Mooney, recording secretary of UAW Local 2147 at General Dynamics Land Systems in Lima, Ohio and a supporter of Autoworkers For Trump; Tricia Geiger, a UAW servicing representative from Flint.

Other nominations for top officers reflect factional conflicts within the apparatus, with incumbent UAW Secretary-Treasurer Margaret Mock and Vice President for General Motors Mike Booth seeking reelection against candidates of Fain's "United UAW" slate.

Boyer, the main apparatus candidate opposing Fain, negotiated and signed the sellout 2023 national UAW contract with Stellantis that opened the door to the mass firing of temporary workers soon after it took effect and imposed below-inflation pay increases. As vice president in charge of auto part supplier plants, Boyer has overseen the bureaucracy's attempt to ram through sellout contracts at American Axle, Nexteer, Dana and other parts plants in recent contract negotiations.

Many delegates at the convention were angered by the huge salary increases that the apparatus voted for itself during the convention, including an additional $30,000 for Fain, and the overall atmosphere of intimidation and bureaucratic suppression. On Day 3, after a number of resolutions from local unions secured enough delegate support to be brought to the floor for votes, the apparatus put forward and rammed through a motion to suspend the rules and block the further consideration of motions that did not have apparatus approval.

The support for Will Lehman's campaign is an expression of a growing insurgency within the working class. Workers are striving to break the grip of the pro-corporate trade union apparatus that blocks them every time they try to fight back.

Following the nomination of Lehman, Martaz Crutchfield, a worker at the Ford Dearborn Truck Assembly Plant outside Detroit, who ran for UAW delegate as part of Will's Insurgent Slate, wrote, "For all my life, like many others, I've toiled my life away to reach a promised ending. And just when we get to the end, the goal post is moved, lengthening our days and making the stresses of being a worker even harder. Even now as I stand here today, I can hardly keep myself upright because I hurt my back on the job.

"We must unite," Crutchfield added, "against these forces that only see our lives as cattle, to make their ends and means grow even further than anyone could imagine. We do not work to have our lives taken away from us. We do not work to see our hard work go up in smoke. And we do not work to allow corrupt corporations to pass their failing companies off on an IPO, to drain away our collective dollar.

"This is where we start making a change. This is where we start fighting for the future, and today in Detroit, Michigan, we have made history, and Lehman is nominated. The call of change has been heard."

Thomas, a Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly worker, said, "Will's campaign showed everybody where the union is going and what it would do. In the conversation I had with him, I had differences with him, but with the way the convention went Will predicted everything. It's going to take a big fight, but Will has many supporters that he doesn't know he has.

"The convention showed we have a dictatorship in the UAW. The IEB got 100 percent of its resolutions passed, and no locals got theirs passed. Will called a spade a spade before anyone saw the spade.

"The rank and file has to take the power from the apparatus. We have to get rid of these International and regional officials who are selling us out. At Stellantis people are committing suicide because of working conditions while the company makes backroom deals with the International UAW. GM hires and fires, and Ford too. We need decent wages. Right now we're living on the bare minimum. Then we got Trump and war and dictatorship.

"Will has to keep his head up and keep fighting, and we'll give him all the support he needs."

Will also received congratulations from many other workers. These included Kamara Bond, a Detroit area Dana worker victimized for speaking out over safety conditions at her plant. At the UAW Constitutional Convention Kamara campaigned for Lehman but was denied entry to the proceedings because UAW officials claimed she was not a member in good standing.

Antwiane Sanders, a Nexteer worker in Saginaw, Michigan victimized for opposing the fourth UAW-backed sellout agreement, welcomed the nomination saying, "Hopefully he gets us back to the unions of old where solidarity really was a thing."

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