Opposition mounts to death threat against UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman

Our reporters
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Opposition continues to grow among autoworkers to the death threat issued by a high-ranking United Auto Workers official against Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president. On Tuesday, Lehman's campaign released a powerful statement by Lehman on the threat and urging workers to oppose it. The campaign also posted a second video containing statements from workers at the Bridgewater Interiors plant and the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit defending the candidate.

In his video statement, Lehman explained that on July 16, Raymond L. Jensen Jr., until recently assistant director of UAW Region 9 and still holding what Lehman called a "cushy seat" as a UAW International staffer, posted a threat on Lehman's public Facebook page. Under Lehman's statement on the federal criminal investigation into UAW President Shawn Fain, Jensen posted an AI-generated image of Lehman bound, gagged and bleeding, with a masked man aiming a rifle at his back.

Lehman said Jensen, who collected over $200,000 last year, according to the union's LM-2 filing—five times the average earnings of the workers whose dues he collects—displayed an "I Support Shawn Fain" badge on his Facebook page.

"This is a federal crime, specifically threatening a union member for speaking out on candidates and union affairs," Lehman said, adding that his attorney Eric Lee has demanded the court-appointed Monitor suspend Jensen without pay and refer the matter to federal law enforcement, writing that "the message transmitted to the UAW membership is unmistakable. Extreme violence against Will Lehman is encouraged and enjoys the sanction of the union leadership."

Lehman noted the Monitor's own office found that Fain created a "climate of retribution" and threatened to "slit the throats" of his opponents.

Jensen's threat, Lehman said, "is no different from Donald Trump threatening the opponents he brands as the radical left. Both fear any action from below."

What the bureaucracy fears, Lehman explained, is the wave of contract rejections sweeping plants nominally represented by the UAW—since 2021 alone, workers at Columbia University, New River Valley Volvo, John Deere, Dana, Dakkota, Clarios and Nexteer have each voted down multiple tentative agreements, with the intensity of rejections only increasing. The officials have likewise watched 90-plus percent strike authorization votes and walkouts they cannot stop. "This frightens them," Lehman said, "knowing their privileged positions are becoming increasingly at risk from a force they find increasingly unable to hold back."

Far from retreating, Lehman's campaign has expanded in the days since the threat was posted. Campaign teams have distributed his statement and leaflets at the Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville, the Detroit Assembly Complex-Jefferson plant, the Bridgewater Interiors and Dana plants in Warren, Michigan, the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly, Sterling Heights Assembly and Sterling Stamping plants, and the Nexteer Automotive plant in Saginaw, Michigan. The campaign team has been joined by auto parts workers and workers from Stellantis Jefferson and GM Flint Assembly.

The second video contains statements from workers who rallied to Lehman's defense when he campaigned Monday at Bridgewater Interiors and the Warren Truck Assembly Plant. "They're trying to shut you up," a young Bridgewater worker told Lehman. "And they usually only do that when somebody's telling the

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truth.”

The 1,000 workers at the Bridgewater plant produce seating and interior components for some of the most profitable vehicles sold by Ford, GM and Stellantis. After workers overwhelmingly rejected a UAW-backed deal in May, the union defied their strike vote and forced through a second agreement last month with starting wages of only $20 an hour—so low that many workers take the bus or Uber to work because they cannot afford to buy or maintain a car.

At Warren Truck, a Stellantis worker who recently transferred back to the stamping plant said, “That’s wrong. The union shouldn’t do that at all. The union is for people like us that work inside the plant, not hauling off and threatening our union employees. That’s wrong, and it’s messed up. Anybody that does support that should be in prison along with Shawn Fain too.”

Support for Lehman has also come from the Dana Driveline plant in Toledo, Ohio, where workers rejected two contracts backed by the UAW bureaucracy. Tommy, a worker at the plant, told the WSWS, “Ray Jensen’s threat against Will Lehman is deplorable, disgusting, and furthermore a perfect example of the negligent abuse of AI. Jensen’s post implies a gross desire for violence against Mr. Lehman, simply for not only criticizing the corrupt UAW leadership, but for openly challenging it. Everyone at the top knows they’re losing support as time goes on, and they know more of their dues-paying members are aligning themselves with Mr. Lehman.

“I call on all UAW members, whether they support Mr. Lehman’s campaign or not, to call out Ray Jensen and the rest of the arrogantly complacent UAW leadership for the threat against Will’s life. Demand the UAW sever all ties with Jensen, and aid in the investigation against him, so that he may face the just consequences of his grotesque actions.”

Rochelle, a Michigan teacher added her voice, telling the WSWS, “Raymond Jensen’s threat to Will Lehman is totally inappropriate and inexcusable. It is particularly egregious coming from an individual that is in a leadership position within the organization, of which Will is a member, and he should have been fired immediately. The UAW’s lack of discipline regarding this matter is certainly troubling and telling. Thus if any rank-and-file member is unhappy with the way things have been handled, one must vote for Will Lehman as he is obviously a threat to the current apparatus.”

The threat has also been denounced by Greg Mooney, recording secretary of UAW Local 2147 at General Dynamics Land Systems in Lima, Ohio and another candidate for UAW president.

In a video statement, Mooney said, “One of the international reps out of Region 9, an organizer by the name of Raymond Jensen Jr., retaliated against one of the candidates running for president and made a death threat. That is totally unacceptable, and it’s gone too far. This has been going on for quite a while, where these International reps, a handful of them, have been going out and attacking the candidates running against Shawn Fain and his slate. I can’t say that Shawn Fain has been encouraging this behavior to happen, but it wouldn’t surprise me if it did. Nonetheless, the people running for international office should not have death threats made against them by international staff.”

Mooney said Jensen had “harassed me and several other candidates” and “has been referred before the IEB a couple times, but that behavior was never addressed.” He added, “We shouldn’t have to be paying these people’s salaries to turn around and attack the membership.”

Nearly a week after the threat was posted, neither Fain nor any officer of the UAW International Executive Board (IEB) has repudiated it, and Jensen remains on the union’s payroll.

But the growing response at the factory gates and the statements of opposition confirms that the threat, far from intimidating workers, has become a catalyst for the very rank-and-file rebellion the apparatus fears. As Lehman stated, “The apparatus resorts to intimidation because it fears you. The answer is not to retreat but to organize.”

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