

Workers in the US, Canada denounce threat against Will Lehman, voice support for fight against UAW bureaucracy

Our reporters
23 July 2026

Opposition continues to mount among autoworkers and other sections of the working class to the death threat made against Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for president of the United Auto Workers. Workers at Stellantis and auto parts plants in the Detroit area, along with other workers in the US and Canada, have condemned the threat and voiced support for Lehman's campaign to abolish the UAW bureaucracy and transfer power to workers on the shop floor.

The threat—an AI-generated image depicting Lehman bound, gagged and bleeding, with a masked assailant pointing an automatic rifle at his back—was made by Raymond Jensen Jr., a UAW Region 9 organizer. To date, the Fain administration has not taken any disciplinary action against Jensen, who was paid \$202,000 last year, according to UAW financial records.

The threat is the response of a bureaucratic apparatus in deep crisis. UAW President Shawn Fain is the subject of a federal criminal investigation for abuse of power and retaliation against his internal rivals. At the same time, the apparatus confronts a growing rebellion from below: workers at Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan rejected three sellout agreements by overwhelming margins, and opposition is spreading throughout parts plants where the UAW apparatus has enforced poverty wages for decades. Lehman's campaign has given this opposition conscious political expression, and it is precisely this that the bureaucracy fears.

Thomas, a worker at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant, said, "To threaten Will like that is a crime. Will is not in play, so they are going after him. These top UAW officials basically have a Mafia mentality. They target people, threaten them, get them fired. Union stewards can put their hands on people, but they don't get terminated. It's a culture and has got to

change.

"At Sterling Heights, they spread out the cushy jobs and pitch a dream: 'You can be like me if you follow the bandwagon.' Anybody with morals gets screwed over.

"Fain, Laura Dickerson, Jensen, a lot of people should be removed for threatening the membership, election fraud and other things—but they are still there. The UAW Monitor is not doing his job.

"Will stood up in his last run. He took the UAW leaders and the Monitor to court. He showed the membership that we can fight and don't have to take this BS. He's not crying over this threat. He's standing tall for the membership. We need to come together—That's the only way we're going to destroy this multi-headed monster."

The WSWs also spoke with Camille, a former auto parts worker from Detroit, who joined Lehman as he campaigned earlier this week at Bridgewater Interiors and the Warren Truck Assembly Plant.

"The threat against Will was honestly egregious," she said. "While I was handing out flyers to workers, I told them Will is an advocate for the working class or else they wouldn't be threatening him. Although it is horrible, it's proof that he truly is fighting for a good cause.

"For these union officials, their air conditioned offices and high paid positions in the UAW are at risk because somebody is finally coming along who is going to fight for the workers. They are intimidated because they are being called out.

"There's no way a UAW official should be able to get away with making a death threat towards somebody without any consequences. If a worker made such a threat against someone at work or online, they would be terminated. During my time at Flex-N-Gate, I saw people get fired for less, including using profanity on the line."

The threat, Camille said, followed "a classic playbook

of the higher-ups using intimidation against anybody who speaks out for workers,” a pattern that has run throughout the auto industry and every other industry for generations. “It just makes me support Will Lehman more in his mission to actually put workers’ issues on the board in the UAW and take back power against these corrupt union leaders.”

Describing her experience campaigning with Lehman, Camille pointed to his knowledge of socialism and the history of the workers’ struggles in Detroit and to a determination unshaken by the threats against him. Lehman’s response, she said, “was to go out there to the plants and campaign like hell and talk to the workers directly.”

She concluded with an appeal to other workers: “Capitalism and worker exploitation, these systems were made by people, and they can be dismantled by people. As difficult as it may seem, it is not impossible to dismantle these systems. It can be done. And we can have a better life for ourselves. It is worth fighting for.”

This week, Lehman visited the Stellantis assembly and stamping plants in Sterling Heights, Warren and Detroit, the Bridgewater Interiors and Dana plants in Warren and the Nexteer plant in Saginaw. On Thursday, his campaign posted interviews with Stellantis workers at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant and Detroit Assembly Complex-Jefferson plants.

Dan, a Jefferson worker, said, “It’s absurd that somebody that claims to be a representative of UAW members is going to attack a fellow UAW member. It’s unjustified. It’s abhorrent. I don’t want to be represented by that.” Referring to Jensen, he said, “He should not be in a higher-up position. People like him just want to be in a position of power instead of representing the people.” Dan compared these methods to Trump, who after he got put into power, “started saying everybody is against me, and they need to be silenced. It’s the silencing of oppositional ideas, which you know, doesn’t fly with me. There should be opposing ideas and let the people decide.”

Support has come from other sections of workers too. A UPS worker said, “With the way the companies are trying to go at us, it’s pretty bad. But when the union turns its back on us and makes us defend ourselves against them, that’s when it is time for them to go! But for right now, I don’t trust any of the union leaders. They’re all in the pocket of whoever pays the most. They forget we are the ones who pay their wages with our dues.”

Workers from other countries have also voiced their

support. Yacine, a Montreal-area postal worker, said, “As a union worker, I wish to condemn in the strongest possible terms the death threats made against Mr. Will Lehman. This type of behavior is intolerable, illegal and can under no circumstances be normalized. The physical and psychological safety of everyone is a fundamental right. I offer my full support during this ordeal and strongly encourage reporting these acts to the competent authorities to ensure the protection of workers and uphold our rights.”

The breadth of this response testifies to the fact that workers see in the attack on Lehman an attack on themselves. What distinguishes Lehman’s campaign from those of Fain, Boyer and others is not a difference over who should administer the apparatus but a fundamentally opposed program. Lehman calls for the abolition of the bureaucracy itself and the transfer of power and decision-making to workers on the shop floor, organized in a network of rank-and-file committees and linked internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Against the economic nationalism of Fain, who has tied workers to trade war and the war aims of the American ruling class, Lehman insists that autoworkers in the US can defend their jobs and living standards only by uniting with their class brothers and sisters in Mexico, Canada, China and around the world. The threat against him has only underscored what is at stake: The bureaucracy will stop at nothing to defend its privileges, and workers can defend themselves only by building an independent movement from below.



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