New Zealand students condemn death threat against US socialist auto worker Will Lehman

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (New Zealand)
30 July 2026

The following resolution was passed unanimously at a meeting of students and young people called by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality's (IYSSE) club at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, on July 29.

This meeting condemns, in the strongest possible terms, the death threat by United Auto Workers (UAW) official Raymond L. Jensen Jr. against Will Lehman, a socialist auto worker and candidate for president of the UAW.

The AI-generated image posted by Jensen on Will Lehman's Facebook page—showing Lehman bound and gagged, and menaced by a gunman—is an unambiguous threat to kidnap and murder Lehman.

Lehman is standing in the union's 2026 election on a socialist platform. He calls for the abolition of the union's bureaucratic apparatus and returning power to workers on the shop floor by establishing rank-and-file committees in every factory, democratically run by workers themselves.

Jensen is a supporter of the current president Shawn Fain, who leads an organisation rife with corruption, which seeks to suppress the growing opposition among workers to pro-corporate attacks on their wages and conditions.

Jensen's post is reminiscent of the fascistic, anti-communist threats made by Donald Trump and his supporters against left-wing opponents. It is an indication of the fear gripping the UAW apparatus that Will Lehman's socialist platform is finding widespread support among rank-and-file members.

The IYSSE (NZ) endorses the demands made by Will Lehman and his lawyer for Jensen to be immediately suspended without pay and for the UAW to repudiate his threat and issue a public apology to Lehman. The federal government Monitor that oversees the UAW must immediately launch an investigation and take all necessary steps to guarantee that the election campaign proceeds without further threats and intimidation.

Jensen's social media post must be investigated as a criminal matter by law enforcement agencies: it is a clear incitement to violence against Lehman.

Failure to take such steps will be seen by workers as implicit endorsement of Jensen's threat. Jensen's post is not just aimed against Lehman, but is intended to intimidate workers who support his campaign and who oppose the UAW apparatus.

The IYSSE (NZ) stands in solidarity with Will Lehman and calls on all young people and students to draw the necessary political conclusions from the threat made against him. As the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) explained, Jensen's post is not merely the act of a deranged individual. It reflects the mentality of a bureaucracy that is hostile to workers' interests and their fundamental democratic rights.

Fain and the rest of the UAW leadership have systematically suppressed opposition to wage cuts and have facilitated the destruction of thousands of jobs. Fain supported Joe Biden's administration of war criminals and is backing the Trump administration's trade war measures and militarisation of the economy.

The situation workers confront in New Zealand is not fundamentally different. Following the mass strike in October 2025 by more than 100,000 teachers and healthcare workers, the union bureaucracy has acted to divide and demoralise these workers, and to push through one sell-out agreement after another to slash their wages. The leader of this country's biggest union, the Public Service Association, openly supports the vast increase in military spending aimed at integrating New Zealand into US-led war preparations against

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China.

The IYSSE (NZ) warns that workers cannot carry out a real fight against militarism, austerity and the far-right without rebelling against the union bureaucracy, who are the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class.

We fully support Will Lehman's call for workers to unite internationally and to reject the nationalism and xenophobia promoted by the union leaders. Workers' rank-and-file committees, as part of the IWA-RFC, must unify workers of all countries against the capitalist system which is plunging the world into barbarism and war.

We call on workers and young people to register their opposition to the incitement to violence against Will Lehman by emailing the UAW at feedback@uaw.org and copying the Will Lehman campaign at info@willforuawpresident.org.

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Students who attended the meeting also gave statements of support for Will Lehman.

Amelia, who is studying politics and art history, said: "It is absolutely disgusting that someone can make such a blatant threat to someone's life and face little to no repercussions. The image posted by Raymond L. Jensen Jr. against Will Lehman is completely inexcusable especially from someone in his position and it is indicative of the corruption within the wider union bureaucracy."

Cameron, a science student and worker, said the threat made by Jensen was intended to make all workers afraid and demonstrated how the union bureaucracy functions "to suppress worker action for fair working and earning conditions."

He called the death threat "an abhorrent and cowardly act which is reflective of the worry of the union bureaucrats toward a genuine socialist movement of workers. I stand in total support of Will Lehman's campaign for the abolition of the standing union structure" and its replacement with rank-and-file committees of workers.

Cameron strongly endorsed the internationalist perspective at the centre of Lehman's campaign. "Globally, there is more that unites people of the working class than what divides us. Simple geographical differences and differences in country allegiances are minor compared to the collective struggle of workers, students and young people against the small yet ultra-powerful capitalist class."

Jorjia, an environmental science student, said: "I believe that Will Lehmann's legal demands in response to Jensen's social media death must be recognised by the UAW. Jensen should be immediately suspended without pay, and steps should be taken to ensure that further threats and intimidation do not continue. Threats to the safety of those involved in the election campaign should be taken seriously as a criminal matter, and remedial actions must be taken to ensure Lehman's safety. The UAW must take a stand that the incitement of violence is unacceptable."

Michael said: "I stand in defence of Will Lehman and strongly condemn the threats and attacks directed against him. No worker or activist should be threatened to be kidnapped and killed for speaking out and fighting for workers' rights. Will's courage in standing up for workers' rights deserves solidarity and support from everyone. The threat made against him should be investigated and criminally charged."

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