

Report to the Ninth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party

The global eruption of the class struggle and the rebellion against the union bureaucracies

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We are publishing here the report to the Ninth Congress of the Socialist Equality Party (US) given by Tom Hall. The Congress was held from August 2 to August 7, 2026. This report introduced the fourth resolution, "On the international class struggle and the building of the IWA-RFC," which was unanimously adopted.

Comrades, the purpose of this report is to motivate the resolution before this meeting and to draw out the political tasks that arise from it.

Since the Eighth Congress, the class struggle has accelerated significantly on every continent. Within this broader movement, a rebellion against the entrenched bureaucracies has developed, while the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are playing an increasingly decisive role in giving it conscious direction.

The next stage requires the expansion of the rank-and-file committees and, above all, the recruitment into the party of workers who, as the Will Lehman campaign for United Auto Workers (UAW) president has demonstrated, will introduce socialist consciousness into the class struggle. Through this intervention the party must establish its political leadership in the working class.

The resolution begins with an appraisal of the objective crisis underlying this development. In paragraph three, it states:

This Congress affirms the assessment made in the opening report to the 2026 International May Day Rally, that the first months of 2026 "mark the point at which the resistance of the working class has emerged as a global force, contending against the offensive of the oligarchy on a scale that places the fundamental questions of the epoch—war or peace, dictatorship or democracy, socialism or barbarism—directly on the historical agenda."

The resolution gives some indications of this process in the form of the growth of strikes both in Europe and the United States. I will add some supplementary figures. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) recorded more than 148,000 distinct demonstrations in 197 countries and territories during 2025. Demonstrations increased globally for the third consecutive year.

Allianz Commercial, in its report on political violence and civil unrest for 2026, ranked civil unrest as the second-greatest political-violence concern confronting corporations. It tracked approximately 250 large strikes, riots and civil commotion events over the previous five years and concluded that economic pressures, particularly the cost of living, are fueling protests and strikes throughout the world.

Verisk Maplecroft reported that its global Civil Unrest Index reached a

six-year high during the second quarter of 2026. It identified rising energy costs, inequality, poverty and austerity as principal drivers.

These figures are bound up with a sharpening conflict between workers and the union apparatus, expressed in the rising number of contract rejections. In a conservative review of publicly reported contract votes in the United States and Canada over the last five years, I identified at least 103 union-backed agreements that workers voted down. Auto parts accounted for 17, rail for nine, food processing and healthcare for eight each, and airlines for seven. There have been 16 rejections so far this year, putting us on track to surpass the record of 24 reached in 2021.

The global growth of the IWA-RFC and its objective foundations

The growth of the IWA-RFC since its founding in 2021—and through it, the authority of the party among the most advanced layers of the working class—is a concentrated form through which this growing objective movement is translated into a new, international and anti-capitalist strategy, and the new forms of organization needed to carry it out.

From the Volvo Trucks and Dana struggles in 2021, through Will Lehman's first campaign for UAW president in 2022, the railroad struggle and the fight against the bureaucratic limits imposed on the 2023 auto strike, the committees have developed through continuous engagement in critical struggles of the working class. The work at Dakkota and Nexteer this year arose on the foundations established through those earlier experiences.

The work has also unfolded internationally, through the VW Action Committee in Germany, postal committees in Britain, Canada and Australia, the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee in Canada and the Committee for Public Education in Australia. Events organized by the committees allow workers in several countries to discuss common experiences and strategy.

Every reason exists to expect this work to accelerate sharply under the pressure of expanding war, preparations for dictatorship and the instability of the world economy. Major eruptions can rapidly draw far broader layers of workers into direct conflict with the corporations, the state and the apparatus.

What objective factors are fueling an increase in the class struggle, of which the IWA-RFC is the highest expression?

First, there is the growing use of mass unemployment as a weapon against the working class. In the United States, the unemployment rate stands at 4.2 percent, while long-term unemployment has risen to 1.9 million. Another 6 million people are not counted as unemployed but say

they want a job, and 4.7 million are working part-time because they cannot obtain full-time work.

Behind these figures, corporations are carrying out a far-reaching restructuring of the labor force. Employers announced more than 1.2 million job cuts in 2025, the highest number since the first year of the pandemic; announced hiring fell to its lowest level since 2010.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) projects a global unemployment rate of 4.9 percent in 2026, representing 186 million people. But its broader measure of labor underutilization—the “jobs gap”—stands at 408 million, 5 million more than in 2025.

The ILO also reports that global wage and labor and income growth has failed to keep pace with productivity or recover the real-income losses produced by the inflation surge. Labor’s share of global income remains below its 2019 level.

In the US, consumer prices have risen by nearly 30 percent since the beginning of 2020. Over the past year, real hourly earnings increased by only one-tenth of 1 percent, while real wages for production and nonsupervisory workers declined. The latest official figures show that almost 48 million people—including millions of children—live in households experiencing food insecurity.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is being incorporated into a program of war on the working class. A subsequent report will examine it more fully, but the investors financing its introduction already speak of realizing the “human-labor displacement value proposition” and taking AI budgets directly from money previously allocated to labor and hiring.

The accumulation of wealth at the opposite pole of society is no less extraordinary.

American household wealth reached approximately \$174 trillion during the first quarter of this year. The top 1 percent owned \$55 trillion—nearly one-third of the total—while the bottom half owned just \$4.3 trillion, or 2.5 percent. This process finds grotesque expression in Elon Musk, who briefly became the first individual with an estimated fortune exceeding \$1 trillion.

The massively inflated share prices underlying these fortunes are claims upon value that must be produced by the working class. Their demand for real returns drives layoffs, speedup, wage suppression, longer hours, the use of technology to eliminate jobs and the destruction of social protections. Speculative valuations must be validated through the extraction of ever-greater quantities of surplus value.

This imperative operates not only within individual corporations but through an intensifying struggle among capitalist states for markets, raw materials, advanced technologies, transportation routes and control over global supply chains.

The situation is the same as that which Trotsky described in his 1934 essay, “Nationalism and Economic Life.” The arguments of those today that the present crisis can be averted through the restoration of hermetically sealed national economies, or through limits on the introduction of AI and other new technologies, were answered succinctly by Trotsky:

The progressive task of how to adopt the arena of economic and social relations to the new technology is turned upside down, and is made to seem a problem of how to restrain and cut down productive forces so as to fit them to the old national arena and to the old social relations. ...

Trotsky concluded:

The fact is that the breeding places of nationalism also are the

laboratories of terrific conflicts in the future; like a hungry tiger, imperialism has withdrawn into its own national lair to gather itself for a new leap.

The costs of this dismemberment of the world economy will be imposed upon the working class. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that relocating supply chains could reduce global trade by more than 18 percent and real GDP by more than 5 percent. Workers would pay through higher prices, shortages and dislocation and through the intensified exploitation required to make nationally relocated production competitive and profitable.

These processes underscore the international dimensions of the class struggle. The productive forces have long since outgrown the national state. Any attempt to restore the supposedly secure national economy of an earlier period would require destroying productive capacities and reducing living standards on a colossal scale. The working class must seize the globally integrated system of production and reorganize it rationally and scientifically in the interests of human need.

An international strategy to guide the class struggle is therefore inextricably connected to the fight against war; the same ruling class is simultaneously directing unprecedented resources into war and the construction of a domestic apparatus of repression.

Worldwide military expenditure reached a record \$2.887 trillion last year, the 11th consecutive annual increase. American military spending has now surpassed \$1 trillion, and the administration is seeking \$1.5 trillion for the next fiscal year. According to the Iran War Cost Tracker website, the current cost of the assault on Iran has reached \$113.3 billion.

An April 2026 IMF study found that military-spending booms are generally financed roughly two-thirds through higher deficits. Where expenditure is reallocated, nonmilitary primary spending falls by more than 20 percent in real terms; during wartime buildups, public debt rises and real social spending falls regardless of how the buildup is financed.

Europe is rapidly rearming, with Germany in the forefront. More than 50,000 auto jobs were eliminated there in 2025, as the government prepared an austerity package attacking pensions, healthcare, unemployment protection and working conditions to finance military spending projected to reach €184 billion a year. Across Europe, the response within the working class to austerity is growing: Italy has seen repeated national general strikes; regional general strikes erupted in Andalusia and the Basque Country in Spain; and Portugal’s June 3 general strike, its second in six months, halted trains, grounded hundreds of flights and closed schools.

War abroad and repression at home are not separate policies. The ruling class must impose layoffs, austerity, military expenditure and the destruction of social rights upon a population that is increasingly hostile to the entire political and economic order. These measures require the concentration of power in the executive, the criminalization of opposition, the destruction of the right to strike and the increasing use of police and military violence.

When we speak of a terminal crisis of capitalism, therefore, we are not simply describing another cyclical recession. The crisis is fundamental, with revolutionary implications. The same globalization of production that has driven the contradictions of capitalism to the point of explosion has created the largest and most internationally integrated working class in history.

Not every demonstration or eruption of social anger has acquired a conscious working-class, let alone socialist, character. But social opposition is coming to dominate the political landscape, and within it the working class will emerge increasingly as the basic force.

The origins of the IWA-RFC and the fight for workers' power

The development of such a conscious movement requires above all the growth of the party's influence in the working class. As Comrade David North put it so powerfully in his opening report to this Congress, the rank-and-file committees are built as instruments of class struggle and as organizing centers of an anti-bureaucratic insurgency. But they exist at the same time as

something more than defensive organizations: as anticipatory forms of genuine workers' democracy and workers' power. In creating them, the working class does not merely resist the existing order; it begins to constitute itself as the future ruling class, developing in embryo the organs through which it will reorganize social and economic life.

The IWA-RFC was developed over decades from the party's analysis of the contradictions of capitalism on a world scale. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the trade union bureaucracies suppressed opposition to plant closures, wage cuts and the destruction of social rights. Beneath this outward stability, capitalism was carrying out an international reorganization of production which we predicted would produce revolutionary consequences.

The main features of the renewed upsurge were anticipated well in advance. As early as 1988, the ICFI wrote in its perspectives document:

We anticipate that the next stage of the proletarian struggles will develop inexorably, beneath the combined pressure of objective economic tendencies and the subjective influence of Marxists, along an internationalist trajectory.

The 1993 Workers League perspectives document, *The Globalization of Capitalist Production and the International Tasks of the Working Class*, stated:

In the coming period the Workers League will have to provide the impulse for and initiate new forms of organization in the working class and in the factories, independent of the trade union apparatus. The Workers League should initiate and develop such committees and link them to the struggle for its revolutionary socialist and internationalist program.

By 2018, teachers' rebellions in the United States and a resurgence of strikes internationally signaled that the decades-long suppression of the class struggle was breaking down. The Fifth Congress resolution explained: "Only a Marxist party ... can detect, analyze and prepare for the deep-rooted processes that will 'suddenly' assume the form of mass revolutionary struggles."

The resolution called for an interconnected network of workplace and neighborhood committees, independent of the union apparatus. Citing Trotsky, it explained that factory committees raise the question, "Who shall be the boss of the factory: the capitalist or the workers?"

An internal 2018 memo dealt with the relationship between the committees, the party and the uneven development of political consciousness. Objective conditions were forcing a resurgence of class

struggle, it explained, but "the party must strive to create the best conditions for the development of the class struggle along revolutionary lines."

The document did not propose restricting the committees to workers who had already reached socialist conclusions. It explained:

Even workers who retain such illusions will agree that it is necessary to create means of struggle by the rank and file without relying on or waiting for the approval of the bureaucracy. Instilling in workers confidence in their ability to act independently and in defiance of the bureaucracy is more than 75 percent of the struggle to overcome the stranglehold of the union.

But hatred of the bureaucracy is not yet a complete break with its program. If the struggle remains limited to pressuring the officials, the tendency toward accommodation will remain and can ultimately produce a new bureaucracy. The existing bureaucracy is not simply the product of accumulated corruption. It is the crystallization of the historic bankruptcy of national reformism, which subordinates workers to corporate profitability and the capitalist state.

Adapting to uneven consciousness would mean retreating from an irreconcilable struggle against the apparatus in the name of immediate demands. A related danger is a "political struggle" detached from the rebellion and the living struggles through which broader layers enter into motion. Rank-and-file organizations must lead these struggles while arming workers politically for the struggle for power. The party provides leadership, fights the opportunist pressures bearing down on the working class and demonstrates in practice its capacity to lead mass struggles.

Herein lies the connection between workers' democracy and socialism. Workers may initially organize to enforce a strike vote, oppose a plant closure or prevent another betrayal. But the attempt to establish actual control over production brings them into conflict with the supposed "right" of the capitalists to determine everything according to profit.

The struggle for workers' democracy likewise cannot be completed without challenging corporate power, breaking with the capitalist parties and unifying the working class internationally. The party does not demand acceptance of its entire program as a precondition for entering a committee. Marxist workers fight within the broader movement to clarify its experiences and demonstrate that genuine workers' control is incompatible with the dictatorship of profit and the national divisions imposed by capitalism.

The 2022 Congress resolution explained:

While the IWA-RFC is not a replacement for the revolutionary party, it is also not merely an instrument of conventional trade union struggles. Its aim is to facilitate the development of a movement out of the control of the corporate-state AFL-CIO apparatus and unleash the tremendous social power of the American working class.

As an initiative of the party, the IWA-RFC is the organizational form through which such a movement can develop. The SEP must strive to introduce the lessons of the historical experiences of the international working class into these struggles in order to raise the political and cultural level of the class as a whole and create conditions for the development of socialist consciousness.

The resolution therefore characterizes the rank-and-file committees assembled under the IWA-RFC as "the fighting organizations and schools

of revolution of the present period.”

The significance of the Will Lehman campaign for UAW president

This entire conception received its most concentrated practical expression in the United States in the 2022 campaign of Will Lehman for president of the United Auto Workers. Lehman officially received 4,777 votes, even under conditions of vote suppression where only 9 percent of the membership returned ballots. The campaign established a national audience for this program and brought workers across plants and companies into contact.

At the same time, the campaign dealt a powerful blow to the bureaucratic maneuver to rehabilitate the apparatus after decades of betrayals. The pseudo-left promoted Shawn Fain as proof that the union could be renewed by changing the personnel at the top. Lehman alone rejected this and fought instead for a program of workers’ power. His campaign insisted that the apparatus was an institutionalized agency of corporate management and the state whose power had to be abolished and replaced with power from the shop floor.

Of the claims that Fain would usher in reformed, so-called “democratic” unions, not one stone is left upon another. Thousands of temporary workers were fired after the 2023 Big Three contracts, and layoffs spread across the industry. Federal monitor reports exposed a gangster regime in Solidarity House which retaliates against opponents and uses the apparatus to enrich loyalists and their relatives.

A series of contracts promoted as “historic” or “transformative” were followed within weeks by sweeping cuts. Chicago teachers ratified an agreement without layoff protections, followed by more than 3,700 eliminated positions. Philadelphia teachers voted 94 percent to authorize a strike, only for the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers to block it and impose 3 percent annual raises as mass school closures were prepared. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) ended the powerful Philadelphia DC 33 strike after eight days without a membership vote while keeping other sections of workers separated.

In the course of these struggles, we came to formulate the following general rule: The stronger the objective possibility of a united struggle, the more directly the apparatus intervenes to break it apart.

Lehman’s opponents denounced him for impermissibly injecting “politics” into the unions—by which they mean socialist politics, not bourgeois politics. The apparatus itself was being integrated ever more directly into the capitalist state, offering its services in trade policy, industrial discipline and the preparation for war. Since the 2022 election, Fain has emerged as a leading representative of this process.

During the 2023 “stand-up strike,” the White House maintained close contact with the UAW leadership in its operation to limit the strike and impose a sellout. Biden appeared alongside Fain to present this betrayal as a historic victory.

Fain functioned increasingly as a de facto member of the Biden administration. Biden appointed him to the President’s Export Council and invited him to the April 2024 state dinner for Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and personally authored Fain’s entry into *Time* magazine’s list of the 100 most influential people of that year.

The preparation of the working class for world war is central to this growing together of the apparatus and the state. Fain’s repeated invocation of the “Arsenal of Democracy,” America’s Second World War economy, declares the apparatus ready to discipline workers for trade war, rearmament and war. Biden expressed the same conception when he called the AFL-CIO his “domestic NATO.”

Fain’s sudden transition from support for Biden to Trump, particularly his trade policy, expressed the continuity of the apparatus’s orientation to the state. Fain endorsed Trump’s tariffs and has developed this into the UAW’s own program of national economic warfare. In the recent candidates’ debate, he boasted that the UAW had participated in USMCA (United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement) discussions in Mexico City and had worked closely with Trump’s trade representative.

The UAW’s June white paper, “Trade and the American Dream,” developed this corporatist program. Its “Build Here to Sell Here” proposal demands a one-to-one production-to-sales quota as a condition for tariff relief. Mexico produces 249 vehicles for every 100 sold there; forcing production down to domestic sales would devastate its auto industry and destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs. The paper also demands an official place for American union bureaucracies inside a US-dominated continental trade structure, culminating in a “tri-national commission” of unions, governments and academic experts working with industry to rationalize supply chains. The apparatus offers itself as the personnel through which trade war, industrial restructuring and labor discipline will be administered across North America.

Fain and his defenders, including the Workers World Party, now present the federal investigation as retaliation for the UAW’s supposed anti-genocide position. In reality, Fain is among the most fervent representatives of the bureaucracy’s support for American imperialism.

The toothless UAW resolution on Gaza avoided identifying the genocide and appealed to Biden and Congress; weeks later the apparatus endorsed Biden and had delegates demanding a ceasefire dragged from the hall as Fain watched. It then delayed and restricted the University of California anti-genocide strike, initially calling out only about 2,000 workers at a single campus.

Trotsky traced the underlying tendency in 1940 in “The Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay,” in which he noted the “drawing closely to and growing together” of the unions with state power. The tendency “derives from social conditions common for all unions.” So long as they remained on the basis of private property, the bureaucracies sought the cooperation of the capitalist state and strove to prove themselves indispensable, “especially in time of war.”

In the *Transitional Program*, Trotsky explained that during periods of acute class struggle, the leading bodies of the unions “aim to become masters of the mass movement in order to render it harmless.” During war or revolution, “trade union leaders usually become bourgeois ministers.” The Fourth International therefore had to “create in all possible instances independent militant organizations corresponding more closely to the tasks of mass struggle against bourgeois society” and, when necessary, face “a direct break with the conservative apparatus of the trade unions.”

Corporatism, the pseudo-left and the general strike demand

Corporatism has long been the program of the social layer from which the contemporary pseudo-left emerged. In 1979, Democratic Left hailed UAW President Doug Fraser’s entry onto the Chrysler board as “the most recent and best publicized breakthrough.” Fraser then helped impose massive concessions and destroy 60,000 jobs in the name of Chrysler’s competitiveness.

The elevation of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and Labor Notes milieu into the leadership of the unions develops this same policy under far more explosive conditions. Figures with left credentials are brought forward to contain the growing opposition, rehabilitate the apparatus and serve as policy advisers. Their elevation into leading positions prepares historic concessions and direct attacks on the working

class, including threats of violence against revolutionary opponents.

As the resolution says, Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) is a model for this type of bureaucratic faction. For decades TDU made the direct election of officers its central demand, claiming that one-member, one-vote would clear out the gangsterism of the Hoffa regime and open the road to rank-and-file control.

But in the June convention, TDU helped return the openly pro-Trump Sean O'Brien to power without opposition. No challenger received the convention delegate threshold required to reach the ballot, and 1.3 million Teamsters were denied even the opportunity to vote for the top officers.

TDU co-chair Antonio Rosario summed up its defense of O'Brien in a *Jacobin* interview: "If you're against Trump, I am personally 100 percent with you. But TDU is not for that." The statement defines TDU's function: It is not for organizing a struggle of the working class against capitalism, against fascism, but enforcing the domination of an anticommunist and nationalist bureaucracy.

We are not dealing here with a clash of programs in a subjective sense, as though the pseudo-left had simply made an intellectual mistake that can be corrected through friendly debate. The pseudo-left is the political expression of a definite social layer: privileged sections of the upper middle class whose material interests are threatened by a movement of the working class against the social order upon which its positions depend.

That is why the pseudo-left universally opposed Will Lehman. Not one of these organizations endorsed him. His demand to abolish the bureaucracy and transfer power to the rank and file threatens their positions within the apparatus and their pathway into the capitalist state. The accusation that the campaign and the committees seek to "destroy the union" identifies the union with the apparatus and the interests of the bureaucracy with those of workers.

This organic hostility has developed enormously. The pseudo-left now occupies responsible positions within the bureaucracy and, through figures such as Zohran Mamdani, within the capitalist state itself.

Mamdani was brought to office by popular opposition to inequality, then rapidly reassured Wall Street, made pilgrimages to Trump at the White House and allied himself with New York Governor Kathy Hochul—a process resembling Syriza in Greece on an American scale and at American speed.

During the New York State Nurses Association strike, Mamdani appeared on the picket lines while aligning himself with Hochul, whose emergency orders facilitated the use of out-of-state scab nurses. His administration supplied the police power while the bureaucracy isolated the strike and imposed agreements far below the nurses' demands.

During the Long Island Rail Road strike, Mamdani refused to support the workers and directed commuters to strikebreaking shuttle buses. The Transport Workers Union simultaneously kept 40,000 subway and bus workers on the job, enforcing the Taylor Law's strike ban. Mamdani bears political responsibility for this framework through his office and support for Hochul.

The citywide agreement covering approximately 90,000 DC 37 workers expires on November 6, creating the conditions for an even more direct confrontation between municipal workers and his administration.

As the crisis deepens, the struggles of workers will acquire an increasingly political character and bring them into direct conflict with the state and with the pseudo-left officials charged with enforcing its policies.

The emergence of the general strike demand in Minneapolis was an anticipation of this future dynamic. The demand arose spontaneously from below amid the mass outrage over the ICE killings and federal occupation, rather than from the unions, the Democratic Party or any existing institution.

The union apparatus intervened to prevent this development from becoming organized strike action. The pseudo-left then worked to conceal this decisive fact. The Minnesota AFL-CIO and Minneapolis Regional

Labor Federation nominally "endorsed" the January 23 protest but insisted that workers remain on the job and obey the no-strike clauses negotiated by the unions themselves. Fain and the UAW, who claim to support a general strike in May 2028, mobilized none of their own members.

The pseudo-left supplied this campaign with a left cover. Left Voice declared before the January 23 mobilization that the unions were "all ... raring to go," when the bureaucracy was in fact blocking a strike. When the Trump administration tactically reduced its visible deployment while ICE operations continued, Left Voice hailed "notable concessions won by the movement."

This political evasion was connected to a complete suppression of the class issues. *Jacobin*, the DSA and Labor Notes adopted variations of the same basic line: Blur the distinction between the pressure from below and the role of the official apparatus, transform a protest and economic boycott into something approaching a general strike in words, and direct workers back toward the same officials who had blocked collective action.

The January 29 statement of the Socialist Equality Party began from the decisive fact: "It is enormously significant that the demand for a general strike is emerging—not from union leaders, Democratic politicians or any section of the official establishment but from below." It called for rank-and-file committees "in every factory, depot, warehouse, office, school and hospital," emergency meetings, elected delegates, demands formulated by workers themselves and direct links across industries and regions. Through this statement, the party was advising workers how to give the emerging impulse conscious policy and organization: Take the initiative in every workplace, coordinate mass action, defend those under attack and develop the committees internationally through the IWA-RFC as the foundations for a general strike.

The work of the rank-and-file committees

During the 2023 Big Three contract struggle, the Autoworker Network of Rank-and-File Committees fought for a program uniting workers across the United States, Canada and Mexico. It sought consistently to oppose the bureaucratic limits imposed on the "stand-up strike" and to organize opposition to the new contract.

In early 2024, fired temporary workers formed a committee demanding reinstatement and the unification of temporary and full-time, employed and unemployed workers.

The investigation into the death of Ronald Adams Sr. in 2025 was another major development. With his family's support, the IWA-RFC interviewed workers and specialists, exposed the bypassing of lockout protections and investigated alterations to machine software.

The investigation culminated in a public hearing, published initial findings and advanced the demand for elected safety committees with authority to stop unsafe production. It began to exercise functions long ago abandoned by the apparatus, asserting workers' authority over life-and-death questions of production.

The UAW election this year comes amid a renewed upsurge in opposition among autoworkers. In 2024 at Dakota in Chicago, workers rejected four UAW-backed agreements. The committee established direct contact with Ford Chicago Assembly workers and called on them to refuse scab-produced parts—an effort to overcome the division between a parts plant and the assembly plant it supplied.

This growing rebellion continued at Nexteer in Saginaw this year. Approximately 1,300 workers rejected three UAW-backed agreements—by 96 percent, 73 percent and 55 percent—and voted 86 percent to authorize a strike, which the UAW refused to call. Workers formed the Nexteer Rank-

and-File Committee after the second rejection.

The committee called on workers to “become the authority” in the struggle. Its statement declared: “Our authority is rooted in our labor. Without us, the Big Three assembly lines stop within days.” Having rejected three contracts and voted to strike, it concluded, “From this point forward, the workers will become the authority.”

The bureaucracy ultimately secured narrow ratification of a fourth agreement through active collaboration with management: Antwiane Sanders was fired after speaking against the contract at an in-plant rollout meeting, and the vote itself was then held inside the factory. But the committee continued fighting layoffs, victimization and unsafe conditions. In July, amid extreme heat and toxic air, 188 Nexteer workers reportedly called off, while mass call-offs produced a near standstill at Ford’s Michigan Assembly Plant. These actions were spontaneous, not organized by the IWA-RFC. But the committees fought to make the resistance conscious and coordinated, calling for nonessential production to be shut with full pay and for workers’ control over safety.

A Nexteer worker recently compared the rank-and-file committees to the Committees of Correspondence that prepared the American Revolution: transferring authority to workers on the shop floor required independent bodies through which they could organize and act.

The VW Action Committee is organizing against massive cuts in Germany, including the threatened destruction of as many as 100,000 jobs at Volkswagen alone, which IG Metall is actively preparing to sign off on.

The VW Action Committee stated:

Workers have no fatherland. Workers everywhere have the same problems. They are confronted with the same global corporations and with governments that deepen exploitation and suppress all resistance to it.

The IWA-RFC is also coordinating on a world scale among postal workers, where active committees exist in Britain, Canada and the United States.

In 2025 and 2026, the USPS Committee initiated independent investigations into workplace deaths. At the Palmetto processing center near Atlanta, where four workers died over two years, it uncovered the absence of basic emergency protocols, medical staff, accessible defibrillators and reliable communications.

The Committee stressed that the unsafe conditions in the post office were the consequence of sweeping pro-corporate attacks on this key public service. At the May 8 meeting of the USPS Board of Governors, Postmaster General David Steiner declared the existing universal-service obligation “unsustainable.” He demanded the power to reduce delivery days and service levels, close “unprofitable” post offices and raise First-Class Mail prices. Since more than half of local post offices are classified by USPS as unprofitable, the program would threaten most offices in the country and subordinate the entire service openly to the criterion of profit.

The postal unions are preparing to enforce this restructuring. The last tentative agreement of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) was rejected by approximately 70 percent of letter carriers, only for essentially the same terms to be imposed through binding arbitration. With negotiations on the next contract now underway, the union is preparing to move directly into arbitration, potentially denying workers even the semblance of a ratification vote. The defense of jobs, safety and universal service therefore brings postal workers into conflict with management, Congress and an apparatus enforcing a state-controlled system of mediation, arbitration and strike prohibition.

The defense of the Postal Service also raises fundamental democratic questions. It was established during the American Revolution for the

circulation of newspapers, political information and correspondence. Its universal network remains essential to the circulation of political information and the exercise of voting rights. Trump’s attacks on mail-in voting have made the weakening and privatization of the postal network part of the wider assault on democratic rights.

These democratic issues are deeply felt among postal workers. That was expressed in Minneapolis in January, when hundreds of postal workers, residents and students marched against ICE’s use of postal property as a staging ground for raids. Postal workers confronted the transformation of facilities belonging to a public service into bases for federal repression.

Lehman’s second campaign and the response of the bureaucracy

This review of the work of the IWA-RFC shows that Will Lehman’s second campaign for UAW president is now proceeding at a far higher level of development than the first. The bureaucracy, for its part, recognizes the danger more clearly, giving the 2026 campaign a more direct and bitter character from the outset.

The apparatus barred workers from the convention, suspended its own rules to block discussion and cultivated an atmosphere of intimidation. Yet Will secured the nomination and has taken the campaign into the plants under conditions of growing rebellion among autoworkers.

The candidates’ debate gave concentrated expression to the class divide. Five candidates argued, in one form or another, over who should administer the apparatus. Only Lehman challenged its right to rule. Fain defended the “stand-up strike” as a success and boasted of his collaboration with the Trump administration on trade. Every candidate except Lehman supported tariffs. He alone opposed the entire nationalist framework, explaining that tariffs raise prices and divide workers internationally, and advanced rank-and-file committees, internationalism and socialism as the alternative.

The debate also revealed the attitude of the apparatus toward a genuine rank-and-file challenge. Raymond Jensen, until recently an assistant director of UAW Region 9 and still an International staffer paid more than \$200,000 last year, had posted an image of Will bound, gagged and bleeding, with a masked gunman aiming a rifle at his back. Jensen’s profile identified himself as a supporter of Fain.

When Will confronted Fain in the debate, Fain first attempted to ignore the issue. He then said, “I don’t condone that stuff,” only to add, “If you’re running for president, get ready, brother, because you’ll be getting them every day.” He announced no action against Jensen. The message was that threats of violence are to be treated as a normal consequence of challenging the apparatus.

The bureaucracy feels itself under siege because it confronts an expanding wave of contract rejections, spontaneous job actions and the growth of an organized rank-and-file opposition. The death threat expresses the ruthlessness with which a privileged apparatus will defend its interests when its power is seriously threatened.

At the same time, the answer cannot be retreat or adaptation. The defense of Will Lehman and his right to campaign must become the basis for deepening and expanding his support among autoworkers and throughout the working class.

Comrades, I want to conclude by urging the passage of this resolution. We are anticipating an enormous development of all the processes we have reviewed: the eruption of the class struggle, the growth of the rank-and-file committees, the political collision with the bureaucracy and the pseudo-left, and the increasingly conscious striving of workers to find a revolutionary way forward.

The conscious factor will be decisive. It would be a serious political

error to assume that the objective crisis will resolve itself, or that our role is confined to observing events and commenting upon them after the fact. Objective conditions create the possibility and necessity for socialist revolution. They do not automatically provide the program, organization and leadership required for victory.

Our task is to intervene—to identify and act upon what is objectively revolutionary in the situation; to develop the committees as organs of independent working-class struggle; to bring into the class struggle the historical lessons and political program of Trotskyism; and through this work to build the Socialist Equality Party as the revolutionary leadership of the working class.



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