# CATERPILLAR WORKERS: BUILD RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEES TO UNITE WITH DEERE, CNH AND AUTOWORKERS IN A FIGHT BACK!



**BY WILL LEHMAN**
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

Dear brothers and sisters at Caterpillar,

My name is Will Lehman. I'm a second-tier, rank-and-file worker at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and a socialist. I am running for president of the UAW International in the national elections in October-November.

An autoworker with Will Lehman (right)

My campaign is not aimed at "reforming" the corrupt, pro-corporate UAW apparatus, but abolishing this apparatus and placing power in the hands of workers ourselves. I call for workers to form rank-and-file factory and workplace committees, which will enable us to communicate and coordinate our struggles across different plants, companies and even countries.

Only on this basis can we carry out a real fight for what we need, not what the companies claim is affordable. To reverse the endless concessions given up by the UAW bureaucracy, we need massive wage increases for all workers, the real end of the tier system, the restoration of COLA and pensions for active workers and retirees, the return to the eight-hour day and end of constant mandatory overtime, and more.

The UAW has been transformed into a union in name only, with a layer of privileged officials totally unaccountable to workers. This apparatus sits on top of more than $1 billion in assets, built up with our dues, which they use parasitically to fund their own incomes and perks, with more than 450 on staff at the UAW International making more than $100,000 a year.

Direct elections for UAW president and other positions are only taking place because virtually the entire UAW leadership was implicated in a corruption scandal. The scandal proved what we had long suspected: top UAW officials were either bribed by the companies or stealing our dues.

People such as former UAW President Dennis Williams and former Vice President Norwood Jewell, who both played key roles in pushing through sellout contracts at CAT over the past three decades, pleaded guilty and were sentenced to jail as part of a federal investigation. Both, however, were released early from their slap-on-the-wrist prison sentences.

## THE UAW BUREAUCRACY'S RECORD OF BETRAYALS AT CATERPILLAR

For many years, "Caterpillar" has been a word synonymous with corporate ruthlessness and strikebreaking, as well as the bitter betrayals by the organization which claimed to represent workers, the UAW.

In the 1990s, the two strikes at Caterpillar, despite the immense determination and heroism of workers, were sabotaged and sold out by the UAW bureaucracy. The result was a historic decline in CAT workers' living standards and working conditions. What followed was the wage and benefit tier system, frozen pay for senior workers, the loss of pensions and COLA, rising health care costs, and the closure of countless plants and widespread destruction of jobs.

The attacks on workers have continued up to today. The 2017 contract with Caterpillar backed by the UAW allowed the company to close the Aurora plant. It included further concessions in wages and benefits, despite the company having benefited from record profits. Many workers at the time suspected, with good reason, that the vote was rigged, given the widespread opposition to the deal.

In addition to the relentless assault on living standards, workers have been subjected to increasingly intolerable and dangerous working conditions. The horrific death of 39-year-old Steven Dierkes at Caterpillar's Mapleton Foundry a little over three months ago was an event which shocked all those workers who read about it. It revealed

the harsh truth so many workers confront every day in the US: brutal and deadly industrial sweatshops which resemble the conditions in the 19th century.

As I said in my statement on June 29 when I announced my campaign, "We cannot forget workers like Catherine Pace and Willie Dee, who died of COVID, and Steven Dierkes at Caterpillar and Danny Walters at Dana, who died from poor working conditions.

"We cannot allow ourselves to forgive the companies and the UAW bureaucracy that are indifferent to these deaths and other injuries. It is up to us to ensure that solidarity means we prevent deaths like these, that we have our own backs."

## THE VOLVO TRUCKS, JOHN DEERE AND CNH STRIKES

A rebellion by workers against the UAW bureaucracy is already well underway. At Volvo Trucks in Virginia last year, nearly 3,000 workers fought a courageous, months-long strike that pitted them against both Volvo (which also owns Mack, where I work) and their lackeys in the UAW, including Ray Curry, the current UAW president. Volvo workers overwhelmingly voted down at least three UAW sellout contracts—twice by 90 percent or more.

No doubt many of you closely followed the historic strike by 10,000 John Deere workers last fall. Deere workers also repeatedly defied the UAW's attempts to force a pro-company deal down their throats, twice voting to reject a sellout contract.

These strikes showed that the ability of the UAW apparatus to suppress workers on behalf of the companies has come to an end. Workers everywhere, confronting a rapid rise in the cost of living and intolerable working conditions, are looking to take a stand and finally go on the offensive once again.

The struggles at Volvo and Deere last year were only the beginning. For more than four months, our brothers and sisters at CNH Industrial in Racine, Wisconsin, and Burlington, Iowa, have been on strike, also looking to overturn years of UAW-enforced concessions. But the UAW apparatus is doing everything it can to keep these workers isolated and to wear them down, doing nothing to inform, let alone mobilize, its hundreds of thousands of members behind them. At the UAW convention this summer, union executives forced a revote by delegates which reversed an increase in weekly strike pay to $500, lowering it back down to $400, ensuring that CNH workers will continue to be starved out.

## BUILD A MASS MOVEMENT TO BRING POWER TO THE SHOP FLOOR!

The UAW-Caterpillar contract expires early next year. But the time for workers to organize, mobilize and seize the initiative is now.

Fundamental change will be brought about not by replacing a few bureaucrats in the UAW apparatus. The apparatus as a whole is rotten and needs to be abolished, with power taken into the hands of rank-and-file workers.

The way for us to carry out this task and to win what we need is by organizing ourselves and uniting the collective strength of the working class. My campaign is in solidarity with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, a growing global network of workers' organizations.

While the UAW executives endlessly preach nationalism to divide and weaken workers, my campaign is reaching out to our class brothers and sisters in other countries and advancing international working class unity to fight multinational corporations on a global scale, for the betterment of all working class people. Caterpillar, a gigantic transnational conglomerate, has a global strategy, and workers can only carry out a successful fight if they have an international strategy and organization of their own.

My name will appear on the ballot for UAW International president this fall. If you agree with my perspective, I urge you not just to vote for me, but to join my campaign and the fight to build a rank-and-file movement to win what we need. For more information and to get involved, email me at willforuawpresident@gmail.com.

### JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

**willforuawpresident.org/get-involved**