CHICAGO FORD WORKERS RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEE ISSUES STATEMENT: "ELECT WILL LEHMAN FOR UAW PRESIDENT!"



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

The following statement was unanimously adopted by the Chicago Ford Rank-and-File Election Committee on Saturday, October 29. To get involved with the Ford Chicago Rank-and-File Committee, send an email to chifordrfc@gmail.com or text (773) 234-7135.

Brothers and sisters,

We've come together to build the Ford Chicago Rank-and-File Election Committee in order to elect Will Lehman for UAW president. As a second-tier autoworker from Mack Truck in Pennsylvania, Will knows what we go through every day. More importantly, he's fighting with us to build a mass movement of the rank and file to bring power back to the shop floor.

We call on all our brothers and sisters at CAP, Chicago Stamping and other UAW plants to mail back their ballots with a vote for Will, which is a vote for putting power directly in workers' hands.

Our committee will not only campaign to elect Will, but through this campaign we will fight for our critical needs and demands. We've seen the UAW bureaucracy ignore our daily struggles as they collude with Ford management both at the national and local levels. As workers on the floor, we face life-and-death safety issues on the line that are ignored and covered up by the company and union officials.

In the last two years of the pandemic alone we've seen workers like 32-year old Caleb Dye die from COVID, along with many others who've gotten infected and seriously ill. Most recently, we saw the death of 25-year-old Sam Hager, who died on the C-crew line after an injury and was not given timely medical treatment. Everybody on the line was traumatized as we watched him suffer from a seizure and die in front of our eyes. Safety is not a priority at all for the company or the union apparatus. We don't even have a proper medical team on the floor.

We're not treated like human beings. We've gotten screamed at by management during fires and tornadoes to keep working, and told we can't take bathroom breaks. Management has kept the line running when the lights stopped working. The plant itself is filthy, and we have to use unsanitary bathrooms that barely get cleaned. We've seen workers get knocked unconscious by machinery and the supervisors start lines back up and literally walk over people to get the line moving to ensure the company makes profits.

If we have a problem, the union reps go straight to the supervisors, and then come back to tell us why we're getting written up.

At the most recent local meeting of UAW Local 551, the union officials wanted to increase their personal expense accounts from $50 up to $500 in the union bylaws! But they can never be bothered to show up on the floor if we need anything.

We see brothers and sisters struggle to make ends meet, lose their homes, cut down expenses from meager paychecks, rack up thousands of dollars in debt, and struggle to even get unemployment benefits during layoffs. Most of us can't even afford apartments in the Chicago metro region where rents go from $1,200 to $1,500 on average for 1 bedroom.

The cost of living is out of control with inflation at 8.2 percent. Gas, food, rent and other expenses cost us a fortune today.

Some of us work 60-70 hours a week. Even if we work a 40-hour week, we can't pay our bills to take care of ourselves or our families. Many younger workers don't make enough to buy a home or to afford to live on their own. And those at top pay have seen their wages stagnate for more than a decade.

The tier system is a divide-and-conquer strategy by the company and the union bureaucracy which has put us workers in a race to the bottom. New workers often start as temps who have to wait years to be converted to full time, only to wait another six years while "in progression" to get to top pay.

Ford and the other auto companies have made tens of billions of dollars while we get poverty pay. Every single hour, workers at CAP produce millions of dollars worth of cars, but the company CEO and the shareholders get to see all the profits of our work. In 2021, Ford CEO Jim Farley made $22.8 million in total compensation. The other top Ford executives make upwards of $10-18 million a year.

Now there's talk in the Chicago business press that the future of the Chicago Assembly Plant is uncertain, while Stellantis is planning on cutting shifts in Michigan and threatening jobs at Belvidere Assembly. Recently, officials stopped the line to chastise us that management may close the plant by January if quality and attendance issues are not addressed. Our union officials stood by and said nothing to defend us. We will not accept such threats to our jobs and our lives as we slave away for the company.

We've had enough, we're fed up and we're going to fight together as members of the rank and file for our interests. And Will Lehman is the only candidate running who speaks for all of us on the floor, because he's one of us!

The other main candidates in the UAW national election, current UAW president Ray Curry and Shawn Fain, are bureaucrats who get their bloated salaries from our dues money. Curry, who makes $272,726, had close ties to the previous two presidents, Dennis Williams and Gary Jones, both of whom were sent to jail for corruption, taking bribes from the companies and embezzling our dues money. Fain, who claims he will "reform" the UAW at the top, has been part of the International apparatus for years and makes $156,364. These candidates are totally out of touch with our struggles.

When Curry and Fain brag of their "experience," it is the experience of a wealthy bureaucrat. On the other hand, Will's experience is that of a worker on the floor, facing what we face every single day.

Will Lehman is calling to abolish the corrupt pro-management UAW bureaucracy and fight for a program based on bringing power to the shop floor and a program for the working class. We need full rank-and-file control over our strike fund, our dues money and our assets in the UAW, as well as rank-and-file oversight over all bargaining.

We therefore endorse Will's demands, as well as demands of our own:

- End the tiers and get us all on the same level, with equal pay for equal work. Convert all temps to full time immediately.
- We need significantly higher pay as well. Will is calling for a 50 percent pay increase and the restoration of COLA, especially after the concession contracts imposed on us by the UAW for decades.
- We need triple time for any overtime after every eight hours, and no more mandatory overtime. The eight-hour day needs to be restored and the Alternative Work Schedule abolished. We are all working overtime because our wages are so low. We shouldn't have to sacrifice our lives and time with our family just to survive.

- On the issue of time off, we need more paid time off that's not set by the company's schedule. We should be able to take time off whenever we want. If Ford wants to shut down, they can pay us for it without affecting our vacation time.
- Pensions must be restored and fully funded, and high-quality health care be given to all current workers and retirees.
- We will not accept layoffs or threats to close CAP or other plants! Workers must receive full pay for any temporary layoffs as well.
- We also need full rank-and-file control over line speed and safety issues.

If you agree with what we're fighting for, join our committee! We, the rank and file, are the only ones who can fight for our interests, as the UAW bureaucracy will not defend our needs. We need to fight for a workers' agenda, for our needs, and our lives.

We also invite rank-and-file workers at Tower Automotive, Flex-N-Gate, Dakkota, Lear and other parts plant to join us as well, and form your own rank-and-file committees at your plants. And we extend our solidarity to our brothers and sisters across the country and internationally, including in Mexico, Europe and Asia. By uniting at the local, national and international levels, we can fight for our interests and win!

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved