DEERE WORKERS: FORM RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEES TO FIGHT FOR WHAT WORKERS NEED!



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

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

My name is Will Lehman. I'm a second-tier, rank-and-file worker at Mack Trucks in Pennsylvania, and I'm running for president of the United Auto Workers in the union's national elections in October and November.

Will Lehman

My campaign is aimed at building a mass movement of rank-and-file workers to finally break the stranglehold of the corrupt, pro-corporate UAW bureaucracy over us and place power where it belongs, in the hands of workers ourselves. To do this, I'm calling for the formation of rank-and-file committees at every factory, warehouse and workplace, so that we can communicate with each other and coordinate our struggles across different plants, companies, industries and countries.

We need to fully reverse the concessions the UAW apparatus has forced on us for decades. We need to fight for demands based on what workers actually need, not what the companies claim they can afford.

We need 50 percent wage increases and COLA to make up for years of stagnating pay and inflation; the genuine abolition of the wage and benefit tier system; fully-paid pensions and health care for both active workers and retirees; an end to speed-up and dangerous working conditions, and more.

For decades, the UAW has functioned as a union in name only. Whether you work at Deere, Caterpillar, CNH, Mack Trucks, Ford, GM or elsewhere, we have all seen our living standards and working conditions get worse and worse, contract after contract, because of concessions pushed on us by the UAW officialdom. Meanwhile, the UAW apparatus, more and more unaccountable to us, has hoarded our dues money and used it to live lavishly, with "Solidarity House" spending $75 million on salaries last year, with more than 450 bureaucrats making over $100,000 a piece.

Virtually the entire top leadership of the UAW, including people like former Vice President Norwood Jewell or former Presidents Dennis Williams and Gary Jones, were proven to be either taking bribes from the companies or stealing millions of dollars in our dues money. The only reason workers are even able to vote in the UAW elections this year is because the rampant corruption in the UAW apparatus became impossible to conceal, prompting state intervention.

But, while the current UAW executives claim that they've seen the light and are implementing reforms, the reality is that the UAW sellouts have continued uninterrupted.

Workers, however, are beginning to say "enough is enough" and are fighting back. After more than two years of a pandemic in which we were called "essential," while the companies were reaping record profits from our labor, many workers are deciding that now is the time to take a stand, as Deere workers did last year.

THE 2021 DEERE STRIKE

German Deere workers showing support for the strike in 2021

The strike by Deere workers last year was a courageous struggle that has inspired workers not just in the Midwest, but throughout the US and in other countries.

For more than a month, Deere workers not only fought back against a giant multinational company, they also repeatedly rebelled against the UAW bureaucracy itself. Workers remembered the way in which union executives rammed through a pro-company deal in 2015, being given only a few hours to review contract "highlights" and then forcing workers to vote on the spot. Workers were determined to prevent that from happening again.

2021 was the year when workers began to say: "No more concessions!" When the first two tentative agreements were brought back by UAW VP Chuck Browning and other

officials, which they claimed had "significant gains," workers responded, "This must be a joke!" The agreements were completely disconnected from what workers were demanding, including far higher wage increases and the restoration of retiree health care.

Workers displayed an incredible degree of real solidarity when they voted down these sellout deals, the first one by 90 percent. You should know that you were not the only workers to rebel against UAW concessions last year. At Volvo Trucks in Virginia, workers voted down at least three UAW-endorsed contracts, the first two times by 90 percent, and at auto parts maker Dana, workers also voted down a UAW-United Steelworkers-backed contract by 90 percent.

At Volvo, Deere and Dana, workers last year started to draw the necessary conclusions. Seeing that the UAW bureaucrats would not fight for you, workers began to organize on your own, forming rank-and-file committees, including the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee. These committees played a critical role in providing information and a perspective during the strike, countering the lies of the company, its media, and the union bureaucracy, and appealing for workers at other companies to mobilize in support.

The UAW apparatus, hoping to isolate you and wear you down, kept you on strike pay of just $275 a week, despite a strike fund of roughly $800 million dollars. Some of you may have heard that the union executive's tight grip on the strike funds purse strings continues: at the UAW convention this summer, after delegates voted to raise strike pay to $500 a week, the bureaucracy intervened and forced a revote, lowering strike pay back down again.

Eventually, the UAW was able to push through a contract based on what the company wanted last year, using lies and bullying to get it through, making a total mockery of union "democracy." Workers have told my campaign that they continue to face many of the same issues they confronted before the strike: the CIPP incentive system is still stacked in the company's favor; raises are still not enough to keep up with surging inflation; and the UAW still tells workers, "The company can do that."

To add insult to injury, UAW VP Chuck Browning defended the entire record of the UAW during the Deere strike in a UAW candidates debate this week, claiming the contract they pushed through "was the best in decades." Lying repeatedly, he declared that the UAW has "eliminated the tiers," when workers can all see before their eyes that the tiers still exist.

BUILD THE DEERE WORKERS RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEE

The Deere strike may have ended, but the struggle against the companies and the UAW bureaucracy to secure the needs of workers goes forward.

Workers everywhere are being forced to fight by runaway inflation and sweatshop working conditions. At CNH (formerly known as Case New Holland), workers in Burlington, Iowa, and Racine, Wisconsin, have been on strike since May 2, with many saying they're looking to draw a line in the sand like workers at Deere did.

At Caterpillar, anger and opposition is growing, particularly after a 39-year-old worker, Steven Dierkes, died earlier this year in a horrific industrial accident, falling into a vat of molten iron at the Mapleton Foundry.

Workers feel in their bones that fundamental change is needed. But this change is not going to be brought about by changing a few bureaucrats at the top. The only way real change is going to happen is by workers organizing and uniting themselves to *force it*.

I'm running for UAW president in order to encourage and organize the rebellion by workers which is already underway.

My campaign supports the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. We cannot fight back against giant, transnational companies such as Deere or Caterpillar with a national strategy or outlook; we need the support and collaboration of our brothers and sisters in other countries in order to win.

My name will appear on the ballot for UAW International president, which you will receive in the mail in late October. 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.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved