DETROIT AUTOWORKERS DENOUNCE DEATH THREAT, RALLY TO DEFENSE OF UAW PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WILL LEHMAN

A REPORT FROM THE WILL LEHMAN CAMPAIGN

Autoworkers are rallying to the defense of Will Lehman, the rank-and-file socialist candidate for UAW president, and denouncing the death threat he received from a top UAW officer and ally of current UAW President Shawn Fain. Raymond Jensen Jr., an organizer for UAW Region 9, posted an AI-generated image on Will Lehman's public Facebook page depicting Lehman bound and gagged, bleeding from the mouth with a masked figure behind him pointing an automatic rifle at his back.

Jensen, who got $202,000 in reported income last year, has a Facebook profile that prominently displays an "I Support Shawn Fain" campaign badge on it.

On Sunday, Lehman released a statement denouncing the threat and calling on all workers to oppose the effort to silence opposition from the rank-and-file. He included a letter from his attorney, Eric Lee, to the legal counsel of the court-appointed monitor overseeing the UAW, demanding an immediate investigation, the suspension of Jensen without pay, a public repudiation of the threat by the UAW, and a referral of the matter to the Department of Labor and federal law enforcement.

Supporters of Lehman began distributing his statement denouncing the threat at factories on Monday morning, beginning with the Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville. In the afternoon, Lehman, who is on vacation from the Mack Trucks plant in Pennsylvania, visited the Bridgewater Interiors and Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit. He was joined by a campaign team, which included a young auto parts worker.

One thousand workers at Bridgewater plant produce seating and other interior components for some of the most profitable vehicles sold by Ford, GM and Stellantis. After workers overwhelmingly rejected a UAW-backed deal in May, the UAW defied their strike vote and then forced through a second deal last month. Starting wages are so low—only $20 an hour under the new contract—that many workers take the bus or Uber to work because they cannot afford to buy or maintain a car.

During a shift change Monday workers took flyers from Will and his supporters as they drove in and out of the plant. One young worker responded to Will's description of the death threat. "They're trying to shut you up. Right. And they usually only do that when somebody's telling the truth."

Will replied: "That guy makes $202,000 a year as an organizer. So, I'm in Region 9 and he's my region's organizer. They haven't organized anything new. They haven't got any more workers in our region.

"All I'm doing is running for a position in the UAW. All I'm doing is telling workers that we don't need those people, those positions in Solidarity House. We need the power on the floor. That's what they don't like. That's why they issue threats."

Several workers expressed their support for Will, with one worker rolling down his window and shouting, "I'm voting for Will."

At the Warren Truck plant, a worker who just transferred back to the stamping plant was angered over the death threat. "That's wrong. The union shouldn't do that at all. The union is for people like us that work inside the plant, not hauling off and threatening our union employees. That's wrong, and it's messed up. Anybody that does support that should be in prison along with Shawn Fain too. Come on, you don't go on and threaten people."

Asked what he thought about Will's call for power to be transferred from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor, he said, "That would be better. We have enough problems trying to get the union to fight for us or do anything." As an example, he pointed to the smoke in the factories due to the Canadian wildfires. "The smoke days were real bad. They gave us masks, but they were only

made for dust. They aren't made for any kind of chemicals or fires. You need a respirator, and if you don't have that forget about, those dust masks do nothing. The factories should have shut down. Even the news said you need to stay in your house, don't leave."

Responding to Will's explanation of the threat, a Warren Truck worker responded, "That is very troubling. I wouldn't think being part of a union that that would be something that anybody would be talking about. I don't agree with that at all."

Will replied, "The real problem is, I'm saying the truth. And sometimes the truth is a little difficult for these bureaucrats to hear. They can be offended as much as they want, but to put a death threat on my Facebook page, I've got a problem with that. I'm calling for an investigation into this."

"I would take it as a death threat, if anybody took the time out to make an image like that," the worker replied.

Will said that union bureaucracy was afraid of a movement of the rank and file that would abolish their high-paid positions and power. "We don't need an International Executive Board. Do we need them, or do you and your co-workers believe you should decide how to carry out a fight?"

The worker responded, "I believe we can all come together as reasonable adults and be able to solve problems ourselves." He pointed to the poisoned air in the plants caused by the wildfires last week. "I believe we should have shut it down. I'm an asthmatic myself, and it was tough dealing with that. Outside it was bad enough but going in, it was like a hot box."

Will said the plants should be equipped with full air conditioning and air filtration systems. "They have that in pharmaceutical plants, but they only have them there because the products require it. So, they are effectively saying you're worth less than the products. They are treating us as expendable. They want to tell you that safety is the most important thing, and they want to write you up when you aren't doing something they want you to do. Then they want to lock you in a box with smoke it in and say, 'Produce me money.'"

The worker said he didn't agree with the way workers were treated but did not know how to fight it. Lehman replied, "As an individual you can't, but that is why we have to come together and have a real, legitimate workers organization, where one of us says, this is a problem and we discuss it, and if we agree we're shutting it down, then we're shutting it down. The union is supposed to do it. But instead, you have a bunch of reps saying this is an 'act of god' and you guys got to deal with it."

Lehman pointed to the actions taken by Warren Truck workers after the death from Covid of Catherine Pace in the paint shop, when they walked off the line and shut down production, as part of a national and international movement of workers to protect their lives. Workers had to take health and safety into their own hands through building rank-and-file committees, he said.

"I agree with that whole heartedly," the worker responded.

Register your opposition to this incitement to violence! Email the UAW at feedback@uaw.org to demand that it publicly repudiate the threat against Lehman, with a copy to the Will Lehman campaign at info@willforuawpresident.org.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved