BUILD RANK-AND-FILE POWER TO FIGHT LAYOFFS AND CONCESSIONS!



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

On Sunday, October 23, at 2:00 p.m. EDT, I am hosting an emergency online public meeting to discuss a strategy to defend jobs. Register here.

Brothers and sisters,

I am writing to you today to make everyone aware: A new phase in the restructuring of the global auto industry has begun, and our jobs and livelihoods are once again under threat.

The companies have already fired their opening shots in this battle. Last week, Stellantis announced that it was eliminating the third shift at the Chrysler Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit. Both Stellantis executives and UAW officials arrogantly lectured workers at Warren Truck about quality issues and absenteeism and threatened to close the plant, while ignoring the fact that they are paying poverty wages in sweatshop conditions and keeping all the profits workers have generated for themselves.

The UAW has claimed that "no one is being laid off," but the company has stated that as many 1,215 jobs will be impacted, and hundreds of "supplemental employees" may see their hours cut to the bone.

Beyond Warren Truck, the Ford Romeo Engine Plant north of Detroit is scheduled to close next month, the result of the UAW's 2019 sellout agreement, which top union officers like Rory Gamble falsely claimed was a "strong" and "life-changing contract." In fact, it was "strong" for the company and "life-changing" for the workers it devastated.

At the Stellantis Belvidere Jeep Plant in Illinois, workers have been subjected to round after round of job cuts, with thousands of layoffs and the elimination of two shifts since 2019. The workers who remain, many of whom are older, are being run like dogs, forced to take on work that multiple people used to perform.

Even larger job cuts are being prepared. The business press has called into question the future of Ford Chicago Assembly, Belvidere and other plants which have yet to be assigned an electric vehicle product.

FOR A NATIONAL STRIKE TO FIGHT CORPORATE TERRORISM

Talking with workers at Warren Truck Assembly earlier this year

This corporate terrorism must not be allowed to take place! I call for the full mobilization of all rank-and-file workers in the UAW to halt any further layoffs or concessions. It is time to draw a line in the sand: The rights of workers must take precedence over private profit!

The traditional slogan of the workers' movement must be revived: An injury to one is an injury to all! If I become UAW International president and the companies are threatening mass layoffs and plant closures, then I would call out all workers in the UAW in a national strike, *with full strike pay*, to fight against such attacks. There is no doubt the pro-corporate, corrupt UAW bureaucracy would attempt to sabotage and resist such a policy. That is why I am calling for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy and the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor through the formation of rank-and-file committees.

The struggle against job cuts must go hand in hand with the fight to improve our working conditions and living standards. If the companies say that less labor is needed, then the rational policy would be to reduce the workweek from 40 to 30 hours with no loss in pay. Of course, the reality is that many of us are forced to labor 50, 60, 70 or even more hours to make ends meet. But this means that wages must be massively increased and COLA reinstated, so that no worker has to kill themselves in order to pay their bills and put food on the table for their families.

Autoworkers have already suffered endless cycles of temporary layoffs from parts shortages and chaos in the supply chains or gone on unpaid leave because of COVID-19, things which we have no control over, wreaking havoc on our incomes. The situation facing "temporary" and "supplemental" workers is especially difficult. My campaign has met many TPTs, TFTs and SEs who cannot afford to live on their own, are paid $16 an hour or less, and who pay dues to the UAW but are told they have no rights and no recourse against being terminated.

The program of the working class must be based on the fight for what we need, including *our right* to a good-paying, safe and secure job, along with time with our families.

A RULING CLASS POLICY OF MASS UNEMPLOYMENT AND WAGE CUTTING

The job cuts in the auto industry are part of a conscious policy of the ruling class to counteract the just demands by workers everywhere for far higher wages and decent working conditions. The Federal Reserve, with the support of both big business parties, is rapidly raising interest rates, seeking to slow down the economy, drive up unemployment and reduce our ability to win wage increases. Wall Street investment houses are already forecasting a slump in the auto industry in the next six months, with rising auto loan rates playing a significant role.

While the representatives of the banks and corporations complain of "wage inflation," the auto companies have made tens of billions in profits since the pandemic began and have received massive bailouts and tax write-offs from the state.

Ford, GM and Stellantis alone have taken in over $65 billion in profits since the start of 2020. This wealth, created from our labor, is being funneled to the banks and big investors through dividends and stock buybacks.

The corporations and Wall Street are using the transition to electric vehicles and new technologies to destroy jobs, cut labor costs and massively increase the exploitation of the workers who remain.

They claim that there is no money for decent wages and full benefits for all workers, but what they really mean is that they don't want to give up any of their profits.

THE COLLABORATION OF THE UAW APPARATUS

Every contract, the UAW executives tell us that we must accept concessions in order "save jobs." But this has proven to be a false and dead-end strategy. We've seen one gain after another stripped away—pensions, COLA, the eight-hour day, fully-paid health care—*and* had hundreds of thousands of jobs destroyed since the early 1980s.

The UAW bureaucrats at "Solidarity House" never speak about the human cost of their policies. Families are split up or forced to uproot and move hundreds of miles away to keep their jobs, only to face new threats of unemployment. For those workers who are cast aside, there are divorces, home foreclosures, drug and alcohol addiction, depression and suicide.

The impact on entire working class towns and communities has been catastrophic. Places like Flint, Michigan; Lordstown, Ohio; Janesville, Wisconsin; the Quad Cities and countless others have been ravaged by deindustrialization, offering working class youth little in the way of a future.

But even as the UAW apparatus has overseen the loss of more than one million active members since 1980, its assets have stayed relatively stable. The

bureaucracy has squeezed more and more dues out of us, while shifting more of its investments to the stock market, a blatant conflict of interest.

In 1980, when Chrysler was on the verge of bankruptcy and worked with the UAW to enforce the first-ever concessions, then-UAW Vice President Marc Stepp made a revealing admission, saying, "I believe that the company will have to trim operations down. But what can you do about it? We have free enterprise in this country. The corporations have a right to make a profit."

This remains the anti-worker, pro-capitalist standpoint of the entire UAW apparatus: Nothing can be done to fight layoffs because the corporations have a "right to make a profit," while workers supposedly have no rights.

WORKERS MUST DECLARE: ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

It is high time for workers to fight back. This is what my campaign is about: organizing the rank and file to transfer power to the shop floor, abolishing the UAW apparatus that blocks us from fighting and launching a real campaign to defend our interests.

I want to conclude with two points:

1. The only way we can successfully defend jobs and secure our needs is with an international strategy. We live in a world economy, and the attacks on jobs are taking place internationally. Over the summer I spoke with Ford workers in India and Germany who were facing the closure of their plants. In Europe, Ford has tested out a strategy of pitting workers in a race to the bottom, demanding plants in Spain and Germany compete to see who would give up the most cost cuts in return for the promise of EV investment, which the union bureaucracies there went along with. That is why my campaign is in solidarity with the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). Our enemies are not the workers in Mexico, China, Japan or other countries, as the nationalist UAW officials would have us believe. Nothing terrifies the ruling class more than the possibility of a coordinated and unified movement of workers internationally.
2. The growing economic crisis must not be placed on the backs of workers, as it was done in 2008, which produced the tier system and a gigantic, historical decline in workers' living standards.

If the corporate oligarchy refuses to provide workers with a livable income and safe and secure jobs, then it has forfeited its right to privately run the companies. This means that the corporations should be placed under public ownership, democratically controlled and run by workers in factory and workplace committees, operated to meet the needs of workers, not the private profit interests of a handful of billionaires.

Brothers and sisters, we must take a stand to prevent another jobs massacre. If you agree with my perspective, I urge you pledge to vote for me, and contact my campaign to discuss joining the growing network of rank-and-file committees.

Sincerely,

Will Lehman

Register to attend the emergency public Zoom meeting on Sunday, October 23, at 2:00 pm EDT to discuss a strategy to defend jobs.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved