GM FLINT ASSEMBLY WORKERS LAUNCH RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEE



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

The statement below was issued by a group of workers who have recently formed the GM Flint Truck Assembly Rank-and-File Committee, following the rank-and-file committees which have also been initiated at Ford Chicago and Stellantis Detroit Assembly Complex - Mack over the past month. To contact the committee and get involved, email gm.flint.rfc@gmail.com.

The GM Flint Truck Assembly Rank-and-File Committee supports Will Lehman, second-tier Mack Trucks worker in Pennsylvania for UAW president. We urge all of our brothers and sisters to vote for Will and to join the fight to abolish the UAW apparatus and transfer power to the rank and file. Will is one of us, he's on the shop floor and knows what we go through every day.

Will has the experience of being an actual worker, not a privileged union bureaucrat trained in selling workers out or working in the interests of the company. Conditions in our plant are deplorable for all workers, and our issues and grievances must be addressed by us. Will is the only candidate advancing a program capable of doing this, and that is why we support him.

Will speaking to a GM Flint worker in August

Of immediate concern is the lack of attention by the union bureaucrats for our grievances. Despite the UAW being a supposed workers organization, we hardly ever see representatives or committeemen out on the shop floor, and when we do, they quickly disappear. They blatantly lie to our faces and put in little if any effort toward fixing problems. They converse with management for hours, instead of being present on the line and generally are out of touch with what is happening to workers in the plant, including the extremely unsafe conditions.

Numerous physically dangerous situations exist. When it rains hard, the shop floors flood, and we are forced to work in standing water, fearful of being electrocuted. Tornado and fire drills are few and far between, with both issues having happened and dealt with improperly.

Five years ago a fire broke out on the second floor and workers had first learned of it through texts from friends who saw it on the local news, instead of management or the union immediately alerting everyone to the danger. The fire continued for nearly two hours before workers were evacuated. This shows that the aim of the company, abetted by the union apparatus, is to not stop the line under any circumstances. Nothing shall interfere with their profits. Pure and simple, it's time for us to take control over what happens on the shop floor.

A significant issue at our plant is the situation with TPTs [temporary part-time workers]. We have tiered labor like other plants, and lower-tiered part-time and full-time temporary workers face particularly horrible conditions. Starting wages for TPTs are $16.67, half the pay of full-time seniority workers. We have unstable work hours, and many of us have to work a second or third job outside of the plant because our wages are not enough to live on, let alone start or support a family. We pay union dues like seniority workers but have no benefits or job security. Workers frequently face harassment from union officials.

There are thousands of TPTs at the plant who are "trained" on dozens of jobs, creating a flexible workforce for GM. This super-exploited workforce creates even more profits for GM, as do the GM Subsystems workers. The tier system must be ended.

Workers are not properly trained on new jobs. This "training" consists in having us read the JES [Job Element Sheet] instruction booklet, often ignored entirely, on how to properly do the job. There is a bare minimum of hands-on training before we are left to figure the jobs out ourselves. This contributes to our constant stress and worry about losing fingers, or crushing a leg, all of which has happened to workers in the plant.

Wages have fallen behind for all of us. Minuscule pay increases in past contracts were pushed on us by the UAW apparatus. The trucks we produce sell for

$70,000-$100,000. We can't afford to buy the trucks we produce, let alone meet our basic needs.

Maternity leave of only six to eight weeks and 60 percent of regular pay is an insult. A lactation room was only provided this year. Before, women had to pump in the unsanitary locker/restroom with no privacy. They get only 20 minutes to pump, but the location can be a 10-minute walk for some women depending on where they are in the plant. The time allowed to women to give birth and spend time with their newborn and recover before forced back to work is incredibly insufficient. Pregnant women are forced to do jobs that can hurt the unborn child, such as bending over the truck frames.

The line speed is controlled by management and enforced by the union. It is often increased with no modifications to the amount of work or the time required for each job position.

COVID continues to spread rapidly throughout the plant, and safety measures once put in place have all been taken away. Nothing is done to prevent infection. When workers test positive they are sent to the medical office and told to continue working without any quarantine period. Masks are not required either, and the disinfecting of workstations is not enforced as it is supposed to be. Management and the union are silent when infections occur and do not report them. The only way we hear about cases is through other workers.

We support our brothers and sisters in Silao, Mexico. They work for the same multi-national company as we do, producing the same GMC and Chevy trucks and share the same interests as us. We reject the divide and conquer strategy used by the UAW apparatus to pit workers in the US, Mexico and other countries against each other. During the 2019 GM strike, the Silao workers refused to work overtime in support of striking US autoworkers, but were victimized for doing so and are still facing repercussions. The only way to fight GM and the corrupt UAW apparatus is to unite with workers across borders in a unified struggle. If they go on strike, we must do so as well.

In launching our rank-and-file committee, we are aware that we are doing so in the traditions of the heroic workers who carried out the Flint sit-down strike, the "strike which was heard around the world."

Flint sit-down strikers

At the time, GM was the most powerful corporation on the planet. Those who led the 1936-37 sit-down strike were not only militant. Many had socialist convictions. They successfully secured major rights and gains. If the original sit-downers could know the scale of concessions carried out by the UAW bureaucracy over decades, they would be rolling over in their graves!

Our aim is to win back what we need, not what GM says they can afford.

We fully support the demands that Will is raising in his campaign:

- End the tiers and get us all on the same level, with equal pay for equal work. Convert all temps to full time immediately.
- Fifty percent pay increase and the restoration of COLA, especially after the concession contracts imposed on us by the UAW bureaucracy for decades.
- Triple time for any overtime after every eight hours we work, and no more mandatory overtime. We need the eight-hour day restored. Workers should be able to live on one paycheck, not multiple jobs.
- We need paid sick leave and time off when we need it. We should not have to use our vacation days for shutdowns. Maternity leave needs to be greatly expanded.
- Everyone should have a pension. The only way to guarantee retirees will keep their pensions is give pensions to new hires as well.
- We need to have rank-and-file control over our own safety. We should be able to stop production if conditions are not safe.

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 because the UAW bureaucracy will not defend our needs.

To contact the committee and get involved, email gm.flint.rfc@gmail.com.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved