FORD KENTUCKY TRUCK PLANT WORKER TELLS WILL LEHMAN CAMPAIGN: UNION REPS ARE "IN BED WITH THE COMPANY"

A REPORT FROM THE WILL LEHMAN CAMPAIGN

Supporters of Will Lehman's campaign for UAW president brought its message to workers at the Ford Kentucky Truck Plant (KTP), the Louisville Assembly Plant (LAP), and the Metalsa auto parts plant in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, south of Louisville. The campaign team spoke to workers on the overnight and morning shift changes. Campaign volunteers distributed literature and held extended discussions with workers about safety, the sellout of retiree healthcare, and the need to form rank-and-file committees.

"A lot of union reps are in bed with the company": a Ford Kentucky Truck Plant worker speaks to the campaign: youtu.be/y1o1ErtxRcY

Ford is pushing plans to expand production at both plants as part of the ongoing US trade war with China. As part of this expansion, robots and artificial intelligence will be used to intensify the rate of exploitation of the existing workforce and eliminate jobs.

Workers at both plants face stagnating wages, rising line speeds, unsafe conditions and a union apparatus that has colluded with management at every step. A financial audit of UAW Local 862 in Louisville documented large, unexplained salary increases for top officials.

The dominant sentiment among workers who spoke to volunteers on Will Lehman's campaign team was that the UAW apparatus is no longer fighting for them. One worker told the campaign:

"I do think there are a lot of union reps in bed with the company. It's almost like you get into a situation and you have to question them: are you fighting for me or are you fighting for them? … Because I don't feel like I'm being supported at all, or that I'm being taken care of like I should be."

Asked for an example, the worker pointed to the routine handling of discipline and the overloading of jobs.

"Basically people are running just to do a job in a certain amount of time frame that they have. They rush in, they may not be able to get water … People getting injured and then they put them back on the same job. This one lady who had to go and get surgery on her hand … They took her off the job and the same part that caused the injury to one hand they put it on her new job, and she just had to get surgery on the other hand."

The worker also described the company's indifference to basic safety, recounting an incident where a worker was cleaning an area and was sent there without a proper vest, partners, or cones to warn forklift drivers.

A young female worker spoke on safety and health hazards and the union's collusion with the company. When she expressed doubt about candidates who merely "have good intentions," volunteers with the campaign explained that Lehman had more than good intentions: he has a program and a perspective, centered on the establishment of rank-and-file committees and the political independence of the working class. This was shown in the campaign waged by Lehman and the International Workers

Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to expose the cover-up by the UAW, management and the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the circumstances surrounding the death of Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant skilled trades worker Ronald Adams Sr. in April 2025.

At Metalsa, where current UAW President Shawn Fain had appeared a month earlier to promote his election slate, workers nodded in agreement when members of the campaign team denounced the incumbent UAW president. The plant has seen two deaths in five years: Lance Winemiller, age 24, struck by a forklift in 2022, and 59-year-old Franklin Logsdon, who was found dead by coworkers inside a chemical holding tank in June 2025. A worker who trained Winemiller said the union "hadn't really done much" after the death; after six months, the only response was a renewed focus on safety vests.

He remarked, "We need a union that cares about us, that is not just collecting union dues. I don't see the higher-ups in the union caring about safety. They are either not here or they are in their office."

Many Metalsa workers are nonunion, having opted out of paying dues to an organization that did not fight for their interests. One worker described how management took advantage of the phony "Stand Up" strike called by the Fain administration in 2023, which left most Big Three workers on the job producing profits for management. Metalsa was able, with the acquiescence of the UAW, to manipulate layoffs so that they only took place on the weekend, effectively disqualifying workers from receiving state-paid unemployment benefits.

On retiree healthcare, stolen in the 2008 bankruptcy and never restored, a worker stated, "We need post-healthcare; when you leave, you need healthcare. Not relying on Medicaid or Medicare." The same worker recalled how the company used bankruptcy threats, claiming, "We would have to drop your pensions," to browbeat workers into accepting concessions.

The campaign team also discussed socialism with several workers. When one young worker called himself a capitalist, a volunteer with the campaign made the point that "workers, those who do the work, should be the ones deciding things." Another young worker wanted to discuss Trump's tariffs and the trade war.

The receptiveness of workers, including those who had opted out of what they saw as a weak and ineffective union, confirms that the conditions for building independent rank-and-file committees exist. As Lehman has stated, the fight is to abolish the layer of detached reps blocking workers, and to lead from the floor.

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved