AT UAW LOCAL 1700 CAMPAIGN EVENT IN STERLING HEIGHTS, MICHIGAN, LEHMAN OUTLINES FIGHTING PROGRAM TO PROTECT WORKERS FROM IMPACT OF WILDFIRES

A REPORT FROM THE WILL LEHMAN CAMPAIGN

On Saturday, July 18, Will Lehman attended a get-out-the-vote event sponsored by UAW Local 1700 in the Detroit suburb of Sterling Heights, Michigan. The local union, which has 6,000 members at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP), invited Lehman and other candidates for the event, which included speeches from candidates for UAW president and other top officer positions, along with Democratic Party politicians running for national and state positions.

The event followed a week in which smoke from Canadian wildfires sickened workers in auto plants throughout the Detroit area, which recorded the worst air quality on the planet. The day before the event, Lehman issued a statement calling for the closure of auto plants and other non-essential workplaces, the payment of full compensation for workers, and for rank-and-file workers to take control of health and safety into their own hands. Even as workers were being taken out of the plants in ambulances, UAW President Shawn Fain issued a toothless statement that proposed no action to protect workers.

A SHAP worker who came over to Will's campaign table confirmed that on the night of July 15 the smoke in the plant was so bad that workers quit their machines, walked back to the blue line on the assembly floor and halted production. She said supervisors bullied workers back to work, and UAW reps did nothing. "The UAW reps let the company get away with everything. It was real bad, and we wanted to go home."

Will said in March 2020 workers at SHAP were among the thousands who defied threats from supervisors and UAW reps and carried out spontaneous walkouts when Covid was spreading through the plants. "We need the leadership on the shopfloor to stand up and shut production if workers' lives are threatened."

A worker at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Stamping plant also spoke with Lehman. "We have all the doors and anything open so we can get airflow through the plant. On Wednesday night, we come in everything's all closed because of the smoke. What are we going do? It's hot as hell in there and we don't want to pass out. So as soon as first shift left, we opened all the damn doors on second shift, and it cooled a building down. In that building, it's my understanding we have over 300 roof fans. 20 might work. Each one of the bays that we've got for the stamping lines, they've got a big four-foot intake fan. Why not put a filter on the outside and turn those fans on?"

Will replied, "We should have modern HVAC systems in the plants. They do it in pharmaceuticals. They air conditioned. Because the product needs it. Because the machinery needs it. But our value is less than that. That's what they're demonstrating. They have money for it. They show it in their earnings reports. They have money to keep us cool and have air that doesn't have contaminants in it. But they don't prioritize it. Workers, as an organized force, must

demand it. Fain is in his air-conditioned office, telling companies they should do the right thing. It's a joke. Only the worker can stop that."

During the event candidates were given the opportunity to address the audience. In his remarks, Lehman said:

"Workers were forced to be in a smoke-filled plant and forced to produce, when the UAW International reps sit in an HVAC climate-controlled misnamed Solidarity House off the floor… Workers don't need to die for the shareholders. That's what we're currently facing. It's an economic system. It's capitalism, and it's the capitalist class, the shareholders, that are the ones exploiting the workers.

"I'm not here to work with any capitalists. I'm not here to represent the interests. I'm here only to represent the interests of the working class. I want workers to be directly in control of the struggles on the floor. Workers are in large agreement with the political changes that need to occur in the UAW, and there's a great interest in fighting for those changes. It's shown in the high strike authorization vote counts of high 90% at many of the Big Three, Allison Transmission, General Dynamics, and my own plant Mack Trucks in 2023. That shows workers want to fight, but it comes to a matter of political perspective, how that fight is going to be led. It needs to be led from the shop floor.

"Many workers here also are disgusted with the lack of communication between the floor and the UAW International Executive Board, and it needs to be questioned about whether the International Executive Board needs to remain or does not. I would argue that it does not. It is not serving the workers' best interests, and the only way it's going to be abolished is if workers take the power necessary on the shop floor.

"Lastly, I'll say that the only way we're going to achieve wins in the future is if we struggle internationally. It is not about economic nationalism anymore. The times of that are gone. They only worked briefly after World War II, when the US was the only major non-bombed-out power, and workers could temporarily secure contract wins. That economic situation has changed drastically. The entire world is now united in production, and that was demonstrated strongly with the COVID shutdown and the parts shortages that we're still facing right now, where one part in Taiwan is not in stock, and it affects workers at Stellantis plants in the US. Workers are an international class. We can't have any conflicts between workers anywhere. But the only way we're going to gain international unity is if workers stand up for it on our shop floor."

In contrast to Lehman's fighting program, none of the other candidates made any serious presentation to workers.

Fain, who is seeking re-election, did not speak at all. Instead, he ceded the floor to Kevin Gotinsky, who is running for vice president on Fain's Stand Up Slate. Gotinsky has been deeply involved in the cover-up of the death of Ronald Adams Sr., the 63-year-old skilled tradesman crushed at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex on April 7, 2025. For Workers Memorial Day last year, Gotinsky produced a joint video with Stellantis management that made no mention of Adams and instead praised the collaborative efforts of the UAW and the company to protect workers' health and safety. The video was released on April 28, 2025—the very day that hundreds of family members and co-workers gathered at a Detroit church to bury Adams.

As for Richard Boyer, the UAW vice president and director of the union's Stellantis Department who is running for UAW president, he delivered a right-wing lecture castigating workers for demanding higher wages. You could demand $50 or $60 an hour, Boyer declared, but "it don't matter if you don't have a job." This was the same corporate blackmail Boyer employed in 2023, when he signed a contract with Stellantis that forced workers using Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) time to exhaust 50 percent of their annual vacation time and 50 percent of their Paid Absence Allowance (PAA) days before

taking FMLA leave. The deal, which Fain and his staff all signed off on, also sanctioned the firing of thousands of temporary part-time (TPT) workers who were promised full-time positions.

Boyer's indifference to workers' lives was on full display last week. As smoke poured into the factories, Boyer sent a letter, dated July 17, to Stellantis local union officials justifying keeping the smoke-filled plants running. The letter claimed that UAW industrial hygienists had conducted air monitoring at Stellantis facilities "to ensure workplace air quality remains within acceptable limits," citing boilerplate provisions from the national agreement's health and safety memorandum. Boyer's only advice to workers being sickened on the line was that those with respiratory or other health conditions were "encouraged to notify their supervisor" and request evaluation from the company's onsite medical department—that is, to appeal as individuals to the same management that was keeping them in the plants. The letter said nothing about halting production, compensating workers for lost time or any measure that would cost the company a dime.

The contrast at Saturday's event could not have been sharper: on one side, the assembled apparatus, which functions as an arm of corporate management; on the other, Lehman's program of rank-and-file committees to transfer power to workers on the shop floor.

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