LETTER TO UAW MEMBERS: I AM RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT TO TRANSFER POWER TO THE RANK-AND-FILE



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

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I'm William Lehman. I am 34 years old and have worked at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania for just short of five years. I am running for president of the UAW, and I bring to this campaign the experiences of tens of thousands of rank-and-file workers.

The court-appointed Monitor has approved me as an eligible candidate for president. For you to be able to vote for me, I must still be nominated at the UAW Convention, which begins on July 25. I am asking you to contact the delegates from your plant today and ask them to nominate me.

DECADES OF UAW BETRAYALS HAVE HAD CATASTROPHIC IMPACT ON MEMBERSHIP

What is the situation that UAW workers confront? Decades of concessions contracts overseen and imposed by the UAW have created a situation where a large section of our members are impoverished. Soaring inflation, over 9 percent, is cutting into our already inadequate wages. Not only can autoworkers not afford to buy the cars we build, we also struggle to pay for gas to get to work! We are forced to choose between putting food on the table or paying for other basic necessities. The 8-hour day is a thing of the past, replaced with grueling "alternative" work schedules and mandatory overtime.

Young workers can't afford to start a family, seniority workers have seen years of stagnating pay, and retirees are living off meager pensions eaten up by rising costs. The same conditions confront all UAW workers, whether they be manufacturing workers, graduate students and other educators, health care workers, or technical and office workers.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic has claimed the lives of thousands of workers and more than one million people in the US over the past year. The virus is again raging through the plants and workplaces, and no action is being taken by the UAW to defend our health and our lives.

Direct elections are being held for the first time this year because UAW executives, including the past two presidents, were indicted and convicted of stealing our dues money and accepting bribes to sell us out. It is not just a case, however, of "a few bad apples." The corruption is a product of the UAW bureaucracy's subordination of our interests to the corporate drive for profit.

THE UAW IS A UNION IN NAME ONLY

All the functions traditionally associated with unions have been abandoned. The unions were formed in order to unite workers and give us protection from unbridled corporate exploitation, but today the UAW apparatus works with the companies to exploit the working class. The organization's headquarters should be renamed "Collaboration House."

The UAW has degenerated into a subdivision of the auto companies, assigned the job of policing the workforce and suppressing resistance to horrible working conditions and low pay. There is no functioning grievance system or committee system.

The UAW lets the companies freely violate the terms of contracts. Safety in plants is non-existent. The UAW allows us to be worked to death, often literally.

Let's take a closer look at the structure of the UAW in its present form. Solidarity House has assets of $1.08 billion. According to the latest filings with the US Department of Labor, the 15 top officers have a combined payroll of over $3 million per year. VP Cynthia Estrada receives $319,021 annually. President Ray Curry makes $272,726. VP Charles Browning makes $208,924. Regional Director Steven Dawes hauls in $200,278. VP Terrence Dittes gets $238,144.

These officials preside over a well-fed apparatus whose combined annual income exceeds $75 million. There are 142 "assistants," 252 "servicing reps," 64 "secretaries," and 22 "typists." (These are real titles). Most of these people are paid between $100,000 and $160,000 annually. Who knows what they actually do? But one thing is certain: None of them are engaged in improving the wages and working conditions of the workers who pay their salaries with hard-earned dues money.

The painful truth is that the apparatus partners with the corporate executives and shareholders in the brutal exploitation of the rank-and-file. That is why the Solidarity House apparatus suppresses strikes, "negotiates" concessions, and enforces the multi-tier wage system.

Workers cannot fight the corporations when the UAW and its massive apparatus of corporate domination are restraining us and denying us our basic democratic rights.

A MASS, RANK-AND-FILE MOVEMENT MUST RETURN POWER TO THE SHOP FLOOR!

My campaign is aimed at spearheading a mass movement of the rank-and-file to break the dictatorship of the apparatus and to transfer power and control over all decision-making processes to the rank-and-file in the auto plants and all work locations.

We must have control over the assets of the UAW, which must be used to support our struggles, not finance an unaccountable apparatus standing over us. I advocate the creation of a powerful network of rank-and-file committees, composed of workers ourselves, which will exercise control and oversight over the union, including national and local bargaining, and the monitoring and enforcement of UAW-corporate agreements.

The strike fund will be used exclusively to support workers' struggles. Striking workers will receive the weekly compensation necessary to sustain long and bitter struggles.

The size of the apparatus must be massively slashed. Those whose employment is not clearly related to serving the interests of UAW members will be dismissed. The pay of all officials will be tied to the hourly wages paid to workers.

It is time for a coordinated struggle of all workers in the UAW, in unity with every section of the working class, to fight for:

- Massive pay increases to make up for decades of givebacks.
- Mandatory Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) to keep pace with soaring inflation.
- An end to all tiers by bringing up lower tiers to top pay and benefits.
- Full funding of pensions and high-quality health care for all current workers and retirees.
- The re-establishment of the 8-hour day, not on the basis of poverty-level wages, but with wages that allow us to provide for ourselves and our families.
- An end to all forced overtime, with no more mandatory weekends that deprive us of lives outside of the factory. The overtime rate should be reset to three times the normal-hours wage rate.

- The transfer of all temporary and part-time workers to full-time workers, with full pay and benefits.
- Rank-and-file control over line speed and production standards, to be negotiated by local rank-and-file committees.

Solidarity House claims that such demands are "unaffordable" are refuted by the fact that billions of dollars in profits are pulled in every year by the auto companies and other giant corporations. Our collective labor is the source of those profits.

Two final points. First, I am a socialist. I see my brothers and sisters struggling day after day to get by as society becomes more and more unequal. For-profit health care is a disaster. The public school system is in shambles. A handful of billionaires now own as much wealth as the poorest half of the US population. In mere minutes, corporate executives make as much as we make in an entire year. Their wealth comes from our labor.

The government is run by the banks and corporations. For all their infighting, both capitalist parties, Democratic and Republican, are controlled by the ruling elite. Every time there is a crisis, like the 2008 economic crisis or the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic, the government provides trillions of dollars to bail out the corporations. It is always the working class that must pay for these bailouts.

Since 2020, one million Americans have died of Covid while the stock market has soared to new highs. Under capitalism, that money comes from our labor. In just one year of the pandemic, from 2020 to 2021, as millions were laid off or unemployed, the 10 richest families in America increased their wealth by $136.6 billion.

The UAW is a part of this network of political control aimed at depriving working people of any voice whatsoever. And I find it sickening that after decades in which we have been told there is "no money" for schools, public infrastructure or social services, the two parties—including politicians elected with UAW backing—find $40 billion to escalate a war against Russia over Ukraine that could obliterate humanity. Many of those who fought to build the union were socialists, which shows that today's UAW leaders are nothing like the rank-and-file workers who founded it.

Socialism recognizes that society is divided into classes. There is a class war taking place right now, but only one class is fighting. Socialism means putting the world's productive forces under the democratic control of the working class and distributing resources, not to enrich a handful of billionaires, but to meet the needs of the whole human race.

Second, in the globalized world economy of the 21st century, our strategy cannot be national. We need an entirely new strategy based on uniting workers everywhere throughout the world. For this reason I support the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which is a growing movement to unify workers across plants, industries, and countries. We confront giant transnational corporations, and we must see ourselves as part of an international movement in order to win.

I urge you to support my campaign and call on UAW delegates to nominate me. If you don't know who your delegates are, you can contact me and I will assist you in finding out. Make sure that you have the right to vote for a candidate that is fighting for the interests of rank-and-file workers, not the Solidarity House apparatus.

For more information on my campaign, email me at willforuawpresident@gmail.com, and text WILL to 877-861-4428 for updates. You can also follow me on Facebook at fb.com/WillForUAWPresident and Twitter at twitter.com/WillforUAWpres.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved

