FORD LOUISVILLE ASSEMBLY WORKERS: BUILD RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEES TO FIGHT JOB CUTS AND CONCESSIONS



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

Dear brothers and sisters,

My name is Will Lehman, and I am Mack Trucks worker in Pennsylvania who is running for UAW president to put power back in the hands of the rank and file. I am writing to Ford Louisville Assembly workers to explain my program to mobilize all UAW members to oppose job cuts and defend our livelihoods.

On November 3, *Automotive News* published an article titled, "Future of Ford's Escape plant in doubt head of union talks." The article reported that Ford had no plans to build a new generation of the Ford Escape and Lincoln Corsair crossover models, "leaving the plant without a product plan heading into contract negotiations next year with the UAW." Because of this, the industry publication declared, "the future is in doubt" for the Louisville Assembly Plant and its nearly 4,000 workers.

These threats were leaked to the industry publication by Ford CEO Jim Farley and other executives who have squeezed billions in profits out of workers over the last two years. Just like GM did before the 2019 contract battle, Ford is using the threat of plant closings and job cuts to counteract the demands of workers for major improvements in wages and conditions next year and, with the help of the UAW bureaucracy, extort even more concessions out of us.

As *Automotive News* notes, "Louisville Assembly won't be the only plant at the center of next year's talks. The futures of GM's Chevrolet Malibu plant in Kansas City, Kan., and Stellantis' Jeep Cherokee plant in Belvidere, Ill., also are up in the air."

Instead of opposing this economic blackmail, UAW President Ray Curry and the rest of the UAW apparatus are rolling out the same pro-corporate script the union bureaucracy has for decades. "Louisville Assembly is a key focus in the upcoming negotiations in regard to securing product and investment," UAW Vice President Chuck Browning, who leads the Ford department, told *Automotive News*.

Every single concession granted by the UAW since 1979—from the abandonment of cost-of-living protections and annual wage improvements, to the two-tier wage and benefit system and expansion of temp work—has been justified with worthless promises about "securing investment" and "saving jobs." These givebacks have never saved a single job. Over the last four decades, the number of UAW members at the Big Three automakers has fallen from 980,000 to 150,000. Meanwhile, starting wages at many McDonald's are higher that an auto factory, and older workers have not seen a real wage increase in decades.

Lehman speaking with Ford Kentucky Truck workers in August

Far from defending jobs, the UAW is openly collaborating in their destruction. Ford is shutting the Romeo Engine plant outside of Detroit based on the 2019 UAW-Ford contract. Stellantis (Chrysler) has slashed jobs at Trenton Engine, Warren Truck and the Warren and Sterling stamping plants—all in the

Detroit area. Hundreds of workers have been compelled to uproot their families and move to other cities to keep their jobs, and many have been forced to take pay cuts and work the most difficult assignments, even if they are on the eve of retirement.

FOR A NATIONAL STRIKE TO FIGHT CORPORATE TERRORISM

This corporate terrorism must be halted! 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 seek to carry out 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.

Lehman's campaign speaking with Metalsa auto parts workers in Elizabethtown, KY in November

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 less labor is needed to produce electric vehicles, 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 no worker has to destroy their health and family life to pay bills and put food on the table.

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.

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 suppress 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 state governments.

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.

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

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.

According to the UAW bureaucracy, 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. In August, I visited Ford workers in Louisville at the Kentucky Truck Plant, where the perspective of an international struggle against these multinational corporations was warmly greeted.

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 and cost of reckless wars must not be placed on the backs of workers.** 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 to vote for me, and contact my campaign to discuss joining the growing network of rank-and-file committees: willforuawpresident.org/get-involved.

Sincerely,

Will Lehman

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved