AFTER THE UAW CONVENTION: THE WORK AHEAD



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

Yesterday, on the floor of the UAW Constitutional Convention in Detroit, I was honored to be nominated as a candidate for UAW International President. I want to thank the two delegates who rose to nominate me. I also want to thank every delegate who pledged to nominate me but was denied the chance under the rule limiting nominations to two.

And I want to thank every worker who made this nomination possible — every autoworker, parts worker, academic worker, healthcare worker, casino worker and retiree who shared this campaign and contributed to it.

My opponents in this campaign represent the apparatus. Chief among them is current President Shawn Fain. In 2022, Fain presented himself as a reform candidate, promising to clean out corruption and finally make the union fight the companies. In office he has done the opposite. He has sold workers out again and again — hailing the 2023 Big Three contracts as “historic” while leaving the hated tier system intact, then standing aside as the same companies announced mass layoffs and plant closures. At every turn he has subordinated the membership to the corporations and the Democratic Party.

Beside Fain stands Rich Boyer, director of the UAW’s Independent, Parts and Suppliers Department, where the apparatus has sold out one struggle after another.

This campaign is directed against that apparatus. It is about the fight to transfer power from the bureaucracy that has dominated this union to the rank and file — to the workers on the shop floor.

Why this fight is necessary is obvious to anyone in the plants. And with each passing day, the rebellion that makes it possible grows stronger. At Nexteer, workers have rejected three contracts and authorized a strike by 86 percent, only to be ordered by the apparatus to stay on the line. At Dana, workers have voted down sellout agreements by overwhelming margins. At American Axle, workers walked off the job and were ordered back. This rank-and-file rebellion is real, it is spreading, and the bureaucracy can no longer contain it.

Behind it stands the experience of every worker in this country. Inflation has gutted our wages while corporate profits have hit record highs. War abroad is expanding, and it is being paid for by cuts at home. Democratic rights are being shredded, immigrants are being hunted down and deported, and the public services working people depend on are being dismantled. Hours are lengthening, retirement security has been hollowed out, and the speed-up in the plants has reached a breaking point.

The anger over all of this is enormous. The desire to fight is everywhere. What it needs is organization and direction.

We are fighting for what every worker needs: wage increases that outpace inflation, safe conditions, an end to the tier system, and secure pensions and health care for active workers and retirees alike. And we are fighting against the system that keeps us in this position: against oligarchy and the obscene inequality it has produced, against the drive to

dictatorship and the assault on democratic rights, against war, and against the corporate exploitation that runs through all of it.

This fight cannot stop at the plant gate or the national border. It must unite workers across every plant, every sector, and every country.

In particular, we must unite autoworkers across North America with our brothers and sisters in Mexico and Canada, who face the same employers, the same speed-up, and the same race to the bottom. And we extend our solidarity to workers in struggle around the world, including the heroic struggle waged by Turkish workers against corporate exploitation and the collusion of the union bureaucracy. The attacks on them are the attacks on us, and only an international response can answer them.

That is what this campaign is for. The nomination is a step forward, but the hard work begins now. This campaign has never been about getting me into Solidarity House. It is about building a genuine rank-and-file movement, a movement that turns every factory into a citadel of resistance and carries the fight from the factories into the neighborhoods, the schools, and every community where working people live and struggle.

I call on every worker, UAW or not, to join us in building that movement: a network of committees, controlled by workers ourselves, that can break the grip of the apparatus and put our struggles back in our own hands.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved