I'M RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED AUTO WORKERS TO PUT RANK-AND-FILE WORKERS IN POWER



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

I'm William Lehman. Tomorrow morning I will be submitting my declaration of intent to run for president of the United Auto Workers. I am 34 years old and have worked at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania for just short of five years. That has been enough time for me to see that it is not a supposed lack of solidarity of workers on the shop floor that is undermining our struggles, but the betrayals of the bureaucracy of the UAW.

Our present leadership assists the companies to triumph over us at every single point. It has overseen concession after concession, on cost-of-living increases, pensions, retirement benefits, healthcare, while dividing us up into tiers.

My campaign is different from every other because I insist that replacing one bureaucrat with another will not change anything about the character of the bureaucracy at the "international" or local level of the UAW. Change will only take place to the extent that we organize our independent strength, through the formation of rank-and-file committees composed of and controlled by workers, not bureaucrats.

My campaign advances the following demands:

1. Not the reform of the existing bureaucracy, but its abolition. We do not need a massive apparatus sitting on top of us, dictating what we do, forcing through contracts that we don't want.

A large portion of UAW positions serve no function other than to conspire against workers. These positions must be eliminated, along with the bloated salaries for union executives who do nothing but sell us out. The UAW has assets of $1.18 billion. Ten staff officers have incomes of more than $200,000 a year, and there are hundreds of so-called servicing reps, organizers and stenographers making more than $100,000 a piece.

The massive assets of the UAW, built up with our dues money, must be used not as a cash cow for the bureaucracy, but to assist us in our struggles.

2. An end to all UAW-corporate bodies, including the joint "training centers" that serve as nothing more than slush funds for the apparatus. The UAW was only forced to hold direct elections for the first time because of the corruption scandal, which has involved top executives stealing our dues money while taking bribes from the companies to sell us out. But it is not just a question of a few "bad apples." The bureaucracy has become part of corporate management.

3. Full, rank-and-file control and oversight. The finances of the UAW must be opened up for review by workers. Workers must have full control over all bargaining and vote counting. No more secret discussions with the companies! No more votes counted by bureaucrats determined to force through sell-out contracts!

Rank-and-file committees of workers must have full control over safety, including the right to stop work if conditions are unsafe, and that stoppage must last until conditions are deemed safe by the committees. If the workers feel at any time that they must strike over conditions, the UAW strike fund must fully back the strike. No more being strung out on the picket line with poverty-level strike pay!

4. A program and plan for workers to fight for what we need, not for what the corporations claim is acceptable. This includes massive wage increases to make up for decades of declining real wages, the restoration of COLA to match wages to soaring inflation, the abolition of all tiers and full health care and pensions for current workers and retirees.

My campaign is aimed at encouraging the growth of a rank-and-file movement of autoworkers, other manufacturing workers, graduate students and

professional workers in the UAW in unity with a growing movement of workers throughout the US and internationally. In the coming months, tens of thousands of dockworkers, health care workers, educators and service workers will enter into struggle over the same issues that we confront.

The companies are gorging themselves on the profits that our labor generates, without any concern for our rapidly declining standard of living due to soaring inflation. Covid is again spreading throughout the plants, after two-and-a-half years of a pandemic that has killed countless thousands of workers and more than one million people in the United States and 20 million globally.

We cannot forget workers like Catherine Pace and Willie Dee, who died of Covid, and Steven Dierkes at Caterpillar and Danny Walters at Dana, who died from poor working conditions. We cannot allow ourselves to forgive the companies and the UAW bureaucracy that are indifferent to these deaths and other injuries. It is up to us to ensure that solidarity means we prevent deaths like these, that we have our own backs.

Two final points: First, my campaign identifies with and supports the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File committees, which is a growing movement to unify workers across plants, industries and countries. Workers internationally are being forced to work under an array of unequal and poor conditions. We must fight with all workers' interests in mind as our struggles are connected by the global nature of production.

Despite the misnamed "international" UAW headquarters, the bureaucracy is thoroughly nationalist, claiming that workers here in the US can secure our interests by opposing workers in other countries. This is a lie. Corporations fight globally, constantly seeking out workers to take less than what it offers the ones it currently employs. As the sellers of our labor, we must unite internationally and not be undersold anywhere, and to raise all of our economic conditions through this unity. We must see ourselves as part of an international movement if we are to win.

Second, I am a socialist. Workers have a lot of mistaken ideas about socialism. This is because there have been so many lies about what it is. Socialism means a society based on the principle of equality, where production is controlled democratically by the workers, not by an elite layer of multi-billionaires and shareholders.

All the great working-class leaders of the past, including those who founded the UAW in the 1930s, were socialists. It is high time for socialism to again be taken up by workers all over the US and internationally.

You do not need to be a socialist to support this campaign. If you are tired of being sold out, split into tiers, forced to accept one concession contract after the next, join and build this movement.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved