TO THE STRIKING PUBLIC DEFENDERS: BUILD RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEES AND EXPAND THIS STRIKE! BREAK THE UAW BUREAUCRACY'S ISOLATION OF THE STRUGGLE



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

Brothers and sisters at the Neighborhood Defender Service in Detroit, New York City and San Marcos, Texas: I send you my unconditional solidarity, and I call on all UAW members and workers in every industry to give your strike active support.

My name is Will Lehman. I work at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and I am the rank-and-file candidate for president of the UAW in this October's election. I am a socialist, and I am running to abolish the apparatus that sits on top of this union and transfer power to rank-and-file workers.

More than 230 attorneys, social workers, paralegals, investigators and clerical staff employed have walked out in the first NDS strike in history. Management's answer to people carrying crushing caseloads has been to propose ending no-premium, no-deductible healthcare and offering a 1 percent cost-of-living adjustment against inflation running at roughly 3.5 percent—a cut in real pay every year of the contract.

Erin Ruprecht, an NDS attorney in Detroit, said in a union release that she was hospitalized this year after a trip to urgent care for strep throat revealed blood pressure so high that doctors deemed her an immediate stroke risk. NDS deputy executive director Shannon Anglero answers that funding is "tightly constrained" and that "the cost of healthcare is not going to go down." She may be describing her budget accurately, and that is the point: what is handed to you as unavoidable financial reality is a political decision about who this society exists to serve.

Consider who you defend—the immigrant worker facing a deportation flight, the mother fighting through family court for her children, the tenant hauled before a judge for the crime of living in poverty. These are workers and workers' families, and their conditions are not "policy failures" but the ruthless function of capitalism, a system in which a handful of billionaires own the wealth the working class produces and the courts, the jails and the deportation machine exist to oppress us.

That machine is being enormously expanded. The Trump administration has built ICE into a modern-day Gestapo that seizes workers out of their homes, tears families apart and ships human beings to foreign prisons without so much as a hearing. The same government that tells your employer there is no money for healthcare has unlimited funds for detention camps, for the police and for imperialist wars that the auto industry is being converted to supply.

My campaign is fighting for an immediate halt to the ICE raids and deportations, for the defense of immigrant workers and for the unity of workers across every border against the corporations and governments that profit from dividing us. So long as the wealth of the financial oligarchy remains private property there will never be money for public defense or for anything else the working class needs, which is why that wealth has to be expropriated and placed under democratic control.

There is no shortage of money in Detroit. The construction of the Wayne County Criminal Justice Center where NDS workers are picketing cost the county $502.8 million, while the billionaire developer Dan Gilbert's company was handed the downtown properties the county vacated. Money for a 2,500-bed jail and a real estate deal is always available; money for the workers who stand between a poor person and that jail never is.

THE ROLE OF THE UAW APPARATUS

Ten days ago, in a message of solidarity with striking Brooklyn Defender Services workers, I warned that a unified walkout across the sector was the only way to

break the isolation that management and the UAW apparatus depend on to wear workers down. What has happened since? On July 22 officials of Local 2325 announced a tentative agreement in Brooklyn and shut that strike down, calling it a historic gain; two days later NDS workers walked out by themselves; three days after that the Bronx Defenders did the same.

This is not bad timing, and it is not confined to legal services. It is the strategy of the Fain administration in every section of this union: a bogus “Stand Up” strike that kept the majority of Big Three workers on the job; denying the right to strike to Nexteer workers who rejected three UAW-backed agreements and were forced to vote on a fourth inside the plant. American Axle, Dana and other auto parts workers were treated the same way, and now legal service workers in four cities are isolated from each other. The apparatus accepts the lie of both corporate-controlled parties that money is tight and sees its own job as managing your expectations downward. This bureaucracy cannot be reformed but has to be abolished.

The alternative the officials offer, particularly in New York, is to appeal to the Mamdani administration to open the city’s checkbook on your behalf. But a budget written under the supervision of Wall Street can be rewritten by Wall Street the moment workers’ demands collide with its interests, and workers taught to wait on a friendly politician will find they have surrendered the only real power they had. That power lies neither in city hall nor in any official’s negotiating skill, but in the independent organization of the working class itself—our capacity to unite across workplaces, industries and borders through organizations answerable to nobody but ourselves. That is what rank-and-file committees are for, and building them is the task in front of you now.

To every NDS and Bronx Defenders worker: Establish a rank-and-file committee at every office, elected by the workers themselves. Insist that every proposal and every bargaining session be reported to the membership in full and in real time, so that no agreement can be handed to you as a finished fact.

To every member of Local 2325: Reject the logic of settling one chapter at a time, and contact the strikers directly rather than through the Joint Council. Fight for a common expiration date and a common walkout across the sector, extending that appeal to the transit, healthcare, education and city workers in every union facing the same attacks.

To every UAW member in metro Detroit, San Marcos and New York: Go to these picket lines and bring your co-workers, and reach out to teachers, transit and other city workers fighting austerity and crushing living expenses.

To every worker reading this, in or out of the UAW: Join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and build it in your own workplace, as the coordinating network for the growing rebellion of the working class.

The October UAW election is not a matter of choosing a better representative to act on your behalf. I am not asking you to put me in power; I am calling on you to take power yourselves, by voting for me to abolish an apparatus that has spent your dues keeping you divided and by building the committees that can enforce your will whatever the official result. Do not let them pick you off one shop at a time. Expand the strike, build the committees, and take this fight into your own hands.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS’ POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved