DEFEND THE FIRED WORKERS AT GM SILAO IN MEXICO!



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

I am Will Lehman, a rank-and-file worker at Mack Trucks in the United States who is running for president of the United Auto Workers (UAW). The 391,000 active and 580,000 retired members of the UAW represent one of the most powerful sections of the working class in America and the world.

The trade unions in America are a lot like those in Mexico. The bureaucrats who sit on top do the bidding of corporations and act as cheap labor contractors. They rob us of our dues and sap our strength by keeping us divided across generations, tiers, plants, industries, and countries.

Breaking free from these bureaucracies is our most urgent task so that we can fight the companies and tackle the main issues we face in both countries—rampant inflation, record inequality, the danger of nuclear war and dictatorship, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and environmental catastrophe.

I am not running because I want a seat at the bureaucrats' table. Rank-and-file committees will only form to the extent that workers fight to establish them at every plant.

This first-ever direct election for UAW president is only happening because it was ordered by the court-appointed monitor due to a corruption scandal that saw more than a dozen senior officials jailed for taking bribes and stealing our dues to finance their luxury lifestyles.

A fundamental issue that I'm raising in my campaign is that the nationalist strategy of the trade unions is dead under globalization. I'm sending this message to you, my brothers and sisters across Rio Bravo (Grande), because we must end the decades long efforts by the trade unions to pit us against each other.

I learned through the *World Socialist Web Site*that General Motors fired 20 workers at its Silao Complex in central Mexico for organizing against the corrupt union (called *charros*) of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). Many of these workers remain unemployed, without severance pay and blacklisted. One worker was forced to escape the country with her family due to violent threats.

GM's Silao complex

I want to state my anger and opposition to these unjust firings. To those who were fired: I will campaign among American workers for your rehiring with full pay and benefits. I will also encourage and assist workers in Mexico to build a movement from below like ours and to encourage you to join the International Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

For American workers who are not aware, this is the situation: The GM Silao workers came to our defense in 2019 during the national GM strike and now they are being punished.

In 2019, as the company sought to counter lost production from the US strike through speedups and forced overtime at the Silao Complex, a rank-and-file group of workers organizing against the corrupt CTM union responded by voting to oppose speedups and overtime in support of strikers in America. Fearing a full-fledged rebellion across borders, GM intensified the firings but was ultimately compelled to shut down the Silao plant at the height of the strike.

Workers in Silao, I feel a special connection to your struggle. A group of my coworkers and I at the Mack Trucks plant in Macungie, Pennsylvania came up with the same idea during the 2021 strike at Volvo's New River Valley (NRV) plant. The UAW forced its members in plants like mine to handle parts produced by scabs at NRV. In response, we formed a rank-and-file committee at Mack Trucks to organize a struggle against handling scab cabs and to break the isolation imposed by the union. We share a common history.

It's worth noting that the fight in Silao began a few months after tens of thousands of auto-parts, electronics and other workers in the city of Matamoros in northern Mexico

carried out wildcat strikes against the CTM unions and walked up to the border with Texas to call on American workers to "wake up" and join their struggle. Thousands were fired and blacklisted there, too. The Matamoros workers sent video greetings to workers in the US who were fighting the shutdown of GM plants in Lordstown and Hamtramck. Workers in Mexico stood up for us, so we must stand up for them.

The American bureaucrats in the AFL-CIO, which the UAW belongs to, did something worse than merely sit on their hands. They intervened both in Silao and Matamoros to actively enforce their nationalist strategy and keep us divided. They used our name and dues money to bribe and train a new layer of pro-company bureaucrats in Mexico claiming to lead "independent" unions, which have done nothing to defend the victimized workers and prevent future reprisals.

Several fired Silao workers, including those dismissed directly for supporting American strikers, said recently to the *World Socialist Web Site* that these new bureaucrats—hand-picked, trained and sponsored by the AFL-CIO—kicked them out and destroyed their own group to impose a union that is now acting no differently than the CTM.

No genuine class independence or international solidarity can be built through such operations of the American bureaucracy, which is working hand-in-hand with the corporations and the US government to suppress our struggles everywhere.

During a historic debate last Thursday among UAW presidential candidates, I declared, "The UAW likes to wave the American flag and say, 'Only made in USA,' when that divides us."

The current UAW president, Ray Curry reacted with the chauvinist statement: "I'm proud to say that our products are made in the USA."

I replied: "Mr. Curry ignores the global nature of production. The reality is that the parts on these vehicles are coming from all over the world. They try to divide us up—the working class—based on country, and that has seen nothing but losses for the working class. It is a flawed, old perspective coming from a bureaucrat who has made millions from our dues. The only division I'm sowing is: workers, not parasites."

I happened to have been born north of the current border and I know enough about history to know that this border is an absurdity—the United States robbed most of Mexico's territory in a war in 1846-48. The AFL-CIO and UAW have always promoted nationalism and this nationalism only facilitated the government's decades-long policy of deporting millions of Mexicans and other immigrants searching for better and safer conditions for their families.

They have scapegoated Mexican workers for stealing "American" jobs while imposing one sellout contract after the other on us. All the while they are distracting us from the fact that it is the American owners, the CEOs, the bosses and the shareholders that gorge themselves on the profits of our labor. These are the real enemies of the working class, not our co-workers in Mexico who are putting in work to feed their families just like us.

My campaign is trying to change all that. Brothers and sisters in Mexico, it is wrong that you can't vote in this election because it impacts you as much as us, but that is beside the point. If we are to fight to defend our jobs and living conditions, we need to end this segregation now and start forging links under an international strategy.

If you agree with this perspective, contact my campaign to begin this process.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved