WHY RAIL WORKERS NEED THE SUPPORT OF THE ENTIRE WORKING CLASS



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

Dear brothers and sisters,

My name is Will Lehman. I work at Mack Trucks in Pennsylvania, and I'm running for president of the United Auto Workers in the union's national elections next month.

As candidate for president of the UAW, I call on autoworkers and workers everywhere to mobilize in support of the struggle by more 100,000 railroad workers in the US. Rail workers are engaged in a fight that has historic significance for the entire working class.

Workers on the railroads have gone nearly three years without a contract and without raises. They have suffered under punitive attendance policies that provide no guaranteed days off, making time with family or even doctor's appointments virtually impossible to plan for. The horrendous conditions on the railroads have driven tens of thousands of workers out of the industry in recent years.

But workers have been determined to fight back, overwhelmingly pressing for strike action, which was scheduled to begin as early as Friday at midnight, when a federally mandated "cooling off" period expired.

Terrified of this growing opposition and militancy, the Biden administration intervened to block strike action and push through a concessions contract that protects the profit interests of the giant rail corporations.

Early Thursday, the White House announced that it had brokered a deal between the companies and the rail unions extending the cooling off period and preventing a national rail strike from beginning Friday.

The agreement—which union officials have since admitted is not even finalized—is by all accounts nearly identical to the concessions contracts recommended by the Biden-appointed "Presidential Emergency Board" a month ago.

Rail workers face a conspiracy of the companies, the union bureaucracies, Congress, the White House, and the ruling class they all represent. The rail corporations, owned by billionaires such as Warren Buffett, are among the most profitable in the US, and they are determined to extract even more wealth from rail workers' labor.

The workers, however, have not yet had the final word. With their backs against the wall, they are organizing to fight back.

While Biden, the companies and the unions were conspiring in Washington Wednesday, over 500 rail workers and their supporters met online in a meeting co-hosted by the Rail Workers Rank-and-File Committee, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. Workers from every sector of the railroads all over the country attended, speaking out against the conditions they are subjected to and denouncing the treachery of the unions.

I was honored to be invited to address the meeting. As I explained during it, my campaign is about building a mass movement of the rank-and-file to break the dictatorship of the union apparatus and place power in the hands of workers. I'm calling for workers everywhere to form rank-and-file committees, so that we have our own channels of communication, connecting us to other workers and allowing us to hear what the truth of the situation is.

At the end of the meeting, a historic decision was made by those in attendance to vote for the following resolution, which passed by 98 percent:

> ***This democratic assembly of rank-and-file railroad workers resolves: 1. We will not accept any act by Congress that violates our democratic right to strike and imposes upon us a contract that we do not accept and has not been ratified by the rank and file. 2. We demand a contract that addresses our needs, including a major pay increase to make up for years of declining wages; cost-of-living adjustments to meet soaring inflation; an end to brutal attendance policies; guaranteed time off and sick days; and an end to the push for one-man crews. 3. We inform the unions that any attempt to force through contracts that we do not accept and that have not been voted on, or to keep us working without a contract, will be in violation of clear instructions given by the rank and file.***

The rail workers are in the forefront of a movement of the working class, which all over the world is seeking to fight back against the ravages of inflation and sweatshop working conditions.

These workers are taking a stand, and workers everywhere must stand with them. I call on autoworkers, other workers in the UAW, and the entire working class to mobilize in support of the rail workers.

Share their resolution on Facebook and on social media, and inform your coworkers about what's at stake. Form your own rank-and-file committees and link up with theirs. And send my campaign statements of support, so that the rail workers know the full strength of the working class is behind them: willforuawpresident@gmail.com.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved