“TRANSFER POWER TO THE SHOP FLOOR”: OPENING REMARKS AT THE UAW PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE



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

Will Lehman is a Mack Trucks worker in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and a socialist candidate for president of the United Auto Workers. He delivered the following opening remarks at the UAW presidential candidates forum on Thursday, July 30.

Watch Will’s opening remarks: youtu.be/H3dMMQyOKAg

My name is Will Lehman. I work at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania. I want to speak directly to every worker watching tonight.

These are not normal times, and this is not a normal election. We as workers confront historic attacks on our conditions and our lives. Workers’ share of the national income is the lowest since records have been kept. Since 2019, real wages have risen just 3 percent, while corporate profits have risen 50 percent. Escalating global war is driving up prices, paid out of our wages. Paychecks don’t cover basic necessities in a country that just minted its first trillionaire. More than 21,000 autoworker jobs have been wiped out since the start of 2024, while the corporations aim to use AI and automation to carry out a jobs massacre.

Democratic rights are being torn down, and our immigrant brothers hunted by ICE agents. And every year in this country, more than 5,000 workers die on the job, because safety is subordinated to profit. In our plants: Antonio Gaston, Ronald Adams Sr., Gregory Knopf — crushed to death under contracts this leadership called historic. This month, workers were carried out on stretchers as smoke filled the plants and the lines kept running.

Why do we confront all of this with our hands tied? The last leadership went to prison for taking company bribes and embezzling our dues money. Shawn Fain, the supposed reformer, was installed in an election marred by voter suppression, and is now before a federal grand jury. And the vice president running against him, Richard Boyer, co-signed every sellout.

This was never about a few bad apples. The bureaucracy as a whole is an arm of management: 560 International staffers paid over $100,000 a year out of our dues. Fain took $276,000, more than four times what a parts worker makes. Last year the apparatus spent $118.5 million on its own officers and staff, 14 times what it paid out in strike benefits.

But there is a growing mood of anger and rebellion — among autoworkers, health care workers, educators, legal aid workers and other workers in the UAW. What we need is a strategy and an organization. Class struggle instead of class collaboration. Rank-and-file committees in every plant and workplace, controlled by workers, linked across industries and national borders, to abolish the bureaucracy and transfer power to the shop floor.

This campaign is not about what I will do for you. It is about what you are going to do. 250 years ago, the American Revolution arose out of the Committees of Correspondence, which established a new base of democratic political power. We face a similar challenge today, and the need to build new organizations of struggle to put an end to inequality and exploitation.

I am not a miracle worker, and I cannot do this alone.
If you agree, vote for me — and build this movement
for rank-and-file power.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved