

“I’m voting for Will because he’s not part of the establishment” —a veteran Ford Kentucky Truck worker

Kentucky and Michigan Ford workers speak in support of campaign of Mack Trucks autoworker Will Lehman for UAW president

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As voting heads into its final stages in the historic first United Auto Workers direct election for national officers, statements of support continue to come in for rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman, who is running for UAW president. Lehman is calling for the restoration of power to the workers on the factory floor and the abolition of the corrupt apparatus.

Supporters of Will Lehman continue to spread the word about the campaign and counter the efforts of the UAW to keep members in the dark about the election, the right of all dues-paying UAW members—temp, retiree or full-time—to vote, as well as their right to information on the candidates in order to suppress the turnout. The UAW apparatus above all fears that Lehman’s campaign will win powerful support from younger workers, temp workers and lower tiered workers, who have been saddled with low pay and denied basic benefits and job protections.

A team of supporters of Will Lehman recently visited the Ford Kentucky Truck Plant outside Louisville. The plant builds the highly profitable Ford Super Duty pickup truck, the Ford Expedition and the Lincoln Navigator SUVs. The plant has also been slated for \$700 million in investment to produce an updated version of the Super Duty. Ford is also building two new battery plants in Kentucky as part of its transition to electric vehicles.

However, the company’s nearby Louisville Assembly Plant (LAP) has no vehicle slated to replace the Ford Eclipse and the Lincoln Corsair crossover

vehicles, which are currently built at the facility. This raises the possibility that the plant could be closed or that Ford will use the fate of the jobs at LAP as a bargaining chip in the 2023 contract negotiations.

General Motors threatened the closure of five plants ahead of the 2019 contract talks and ended up closing three, including the historic Lordstown Assembly Plant in northeast Ohio.

One analyst told *Automotive News* that the closure of LAP cannot be ruled out since Ford is building a new electric vehicle assembly plant in Tennessee as part of its Blue Oval complex outside Memphis. The company has not stated publicly whether it plans to recognize the UAW at the new facility.

Lehman has issued a statement calling for the full mobilization of UAW members, including a national strike, to oppose job cut threats at LAP and other factories.

“When you add capacity, it always puts an older plant at risk,” the analyst said. “Louisville is a large plant, and it has an established work force. But on the negative side, it’s approaching its 70th birthday.”

“I’m voting for Will because he’s not part of the establishment,” a veteran KTP worker told campaigners. “[UAW President] Ray Curry’s team and the Team United are part of the establishment and are not going to do anything for us. We need pretty much everything [Will] has posted in this flyer: cost of living, get rid of the two-tier, pay raise and pensions for everybody.

“We need the stuff we gave away. We need someone to fight for us to help get it back. We need to help one another. People are working at Ford who are homeless. I know people who are going through a rough patch, and we need people to have better pay, equal pay. ... I have family who are losing their homes. ... It’s ridiculous, especially here in Louisville.

“Ford is a multibillion-dollar company, and there is no way anybody should be here who is homeless or going through a rough patch in their finances. We need to have a 50 percent pay increase and COLA. If that’s what we are wanting back, then [Will] is a good guy to be put in charge.”

A young Kentucky Truck Plant worker said, “The biggest issues for me are the overloading of jobs and the tier system. The UAW gave away so much for second-tier workers like pensions. There are no real safety regulations on the jobs. I was injured because of the overloading of my job.

“I agree with Will’s call for pay raises and COLA. Workers at Amazon are making more than what a new worker is paid at Ford. In the last contract, even the Tier One workers lost out on raises.

“The attendance policy is very bad too. People are working even if they have COVID because they can’t afford a leave of absence. The point system is used to keep workers from taking a day off.

“I been following the railroad workers. They are fighting for higher pay and for sick days. They had to work throughout the pandemic. Now management and Biden are trying to keep them from striking. They called all of us ‘essential workers,’ railroad workers, semi-truck drivers, health care and manufacturing workers. After the short lockdown, they say it’s ok now, go back to work, catch COVID.”

Ford workers in Detroit have also responded powerfully to Will Lehman’s campaign.

Ed, a young worker at the Dearborn Truck Assembly Plant outside of Detroit, has worked at the plant since October 2021. He told Lehman’s supporters that although he is full-time, he earns only \$18 an hour.

He has already been bumped around to different crews and different jobs three times. He started out on the A Crew but was bumped to the C Crew, where he lost his previous job because it was already occupied. After some time he asked to be shifted back to the A Crew, where once again his old job was taken by

another worker.

Ed said he was considering voting for Will Lehman saying, “My biggest complaint is that they don’t give you any real training to do a job. They just throw you onto a job. There’s no communication with the workers, either from the company or the union.”

Carl, a worker at the Ford Michigan Assembly Plant in the Detroit suburb of Wayne, said he is full-time, second tier and on the third shift. He had received a ballot and was planning to send it in last weekend.

“I’m all for what Will is saying, including setting up rank-and-file committees and putting the power in the hands of the workers. Nobody will do it for us,” he said.

“One of my buddies recommended me for this job at Ford. I’m not from a Ford family. I thought, great! With a job at Ford my problems are solved. In the old days, the autoworkers set the standard for the middle class.

“But that’s not the case now. The wages are too low. People with families have a hard time keeping their head above water. They have to think about getting second jobs.

“I just transferred to the paint shop. You never know when you are working and when you are off.”



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