

UAW orders workers to stay on job past contract expiration at Volvo-Mack trucks

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The United Auto Workers has kept some 3,750 Mack and Volvo truck workers on the job following the October 1 expiration of their contract. The factories in Pennsylvania and Maryland produce Class 8 heavy-duty trucks with a gross vehicle weight rating of over 33,000 pounds.

On September 20, workers at the Mack plant in Macungie, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Allentown, had voted overwhelmingly for strike authorization. Most of the plant's 1,850 workers are members of UAW Local 677. The Macungie facility produces all the Mack trucks for North America and export.

Vote totals for workers at the Mack-Volvo truck powertrain and axle factory in Hagerstown, Maryland are not available. The plant employs 1,900 workers, members of UAW Amalgamated Local 171 and 1247. The plant announced the addition of 80 new jobs this past July 9.

No details of the content of the current negotiations have been released. However, whatever settlement is adopted it is likely to be patterned on the concessions currently being demanded by General Motors, where nearly 50,000 workers have been on strike since September 17. Mack workers ratified a previous three-year deal in October 2016.

On Wednesday morning Local 171 President David Fowler informed workers, "Still in negotiations. This is what I would refer to as an hour-by-hour continuation (I don't like using the word extension). All shifts continue to work as scheduled until further notice."

While the UAW has so far managed to keep the workers from walking out, there is increasing opposition. Posts by workers on social media indicate widespread impatience. A comment by a worker on Facebook that was widely liked by his fellow Volvo-Mack coworkers said of the UAW delay tactics, "We

all know you are doing all you can but [i]n my book a deadline is a deadline. Enough of the games. If I'm 30 seconds late I get a point ..."

Another worker, Jamie Hawbaker, expressed disgust at the UAW bureaucracy's order to work past the contract expiration. "Deadline my ass. Don't forget we still got a vote. Tired of the smoke and mirrors."

The UAW's efforts to prevent a joint struggle by the workers from Volvo-Mack is demonstrated by the fact that it has in place a separate contract for workers at the Volvo Trucks North America assembly plant in New River Valley, Virginia. The plant builds heavy-duty commercial trucks and is the company's largest truck manufacturing facility worldwide. The current contract covers about 2,000 members of UAW Local 2069 and does not expire until March 2021.

Volvo trucks has over 52,000 employees worldwide. Mack is a subsidiary of the Gothenberg, Sweden-based multinational Volvo Group, which made the purchase in January 2001 and has over 105,000 employees worldwide with over \$39 billion in 2018 revenues. Volvo cars was sold to Ford in 1999, and then was sold to Geely of China in 2010.

The truck manufacturing industry has had record levels of production over the past few years according to trade publications. Last year Mack was able to secure a \$296 million US military contract to produce 683 heavy dump trucks that are to be assembled at the Macungie facility in Pennsylvania.

The Volvo New River Valley (NRV) plant this past June announced a \$400 million expansion that will add 777 people to its workforce over the next six years. The NRV facility produces all the Volvo trucks sold in North America. There has been a rapid expansion at NRV from 2,600 workers in the beginning of 2018 to 3,500 currently. The workers are members of UAW

Local 2069 and their contract with the company expires on March 16, 2021. The NRV workers struck in 2008.

An article in *Transport Topics* in July reported that Volvo Trucks North America (VTNA) posted a year over year 2.4 percent increase in truck sales, with 12,738 Class 8 trucks sold in the first half of the year. Results for VTNA's subsidiary Mack Trucks for the same period increased by 9.6 percent, with 9,429 units sold. In the same article, Magnus Koeck VTNA's marketing vice president, conveyed the continued expectation that the UAW would cooperate with the company in pushing through concessions to keep production and profits up, saying, "We enjoyed a very strong first half of 2019 and expect to see continued economic strength and a healthy market for the rest of the year."

The history of the UAW in southeastern Pennsylvania and Maryland is one of continual betrayals of workers as cuts, layoffs and plant closures have been imposed by management with the complicity of the union. The closure this year of GM's Baltimore White Marsh transmission operations without opposition on the part of the UAW is just the latest example.

Navistar trucks announced this week that it is building a new factory to manufacture Class 6-8 trucks in San Antonio, Texas for \$250 million that will be staffed by 600 workers. However, Navistar earlier this month announced the layoff of 136 workers, members of UAW Local 402, at its medium-sized truck assembly plant in Springfield, Ohio. It also has a factory in Escobedo, Mexico producing Class 8 trucks. Former UAW President Dennis Williams was on the board of Navistar, which is 17 percent owned by Volkswagen AG.

Truck maker Freightliner in collaboration with the UAW secured ratification of a six-year contract in July of last year. The subsidiary of Daimler Trucks North America is the largest heavy-duty truck manufacturer in the US and has plants in North Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia.



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