

As UAW keeps Mack-Volvo workers on job past contract deadline, Daimler's Freightliner Trucks cuts 900 jobs

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Last week Daimler Trucks North America (DTNA) announced it will lay off 900 workers who produce Freightliner and Western Star commercial heavy-duty trucks in Cleveland and Mount Holly, North Carolina. DTNA will cut 450 workers at each facility on October 14.

The German-based manufacturer, one of the largest heavy-duty truck makers in the world, blames the layoffs on a slowdown in sales. Far from opposing the cuts, the United Auto Workers (UAW) union has sanctioned the layoffs as it has repeatedly in the past.

The Mt. Holly factory was built in 1979 and has 1,714 employees who are members of UAW Local 5285. The Cleveland plant, built in 1989, employs 2,878 workers who are members of UAW Local 3520. Nearly 1,000 workers at the Cleveland plant lost their jobs in 2016. DTNA has seven plants throughout the US along with two plants in Mexico.

Last year, the UAW pushed through a six-year concessions contract covering 6,000 Freightliner workers in High Point, Cleveland, Gastonia, Mt. Holly, North Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; and Memphis, Tennessee. The UAW ignored the 98 percent strike vote by Freightliner workers and kept on them on the job for months past their contract deadline before signing a deal that provided 3 percent annual raises or bonuses. While the UAW claimed to have ended the hated two-tier wage and benefit system by revamping the so-called wage progression scale, in fact, the workers who are told to wait years to reach top pay scale are now being laid off and will have to start all over if they are ever hired back.

The Freightliner deal was overseen by UAW Vice President Terry Dittes who is now colluding with

General Motors to end the national strike by 48,000 GM workers and impose new givebacks. Like the auto industry, global truck manufacturers are increasingly investing in electric and autonomous vehicles and are looking to slash labor costs and sharply increase the number of low-paid workers who can be hired and fired at will. In both cases, the UAW is helping the companies to achieve this goal.

Transportation industry publications have said that the industry is currently in a recession similar to what occurred in 2016. The Trump administration has furiously denied that its anti-worker policies, which includes tax cuts for the wealthy, are being paid for through stagnating wages and diminishing conditions for workers.

Last year the company and truck industry overall had a record year of sales, and now that the pace has begun to recede, the corporations are looking to the UAW to prevent worker opposition to job cuts.

In January 2016, the UAW sanctioned the layoff of about 1,000 workers at the Cleveland factory.

Workers are becoming more aware of the nature of the UAW officials like former UAW Region 8 Director and Secretary-Treasurer Gary Casteel, who unexpectedly retired in 2018 in anticipation of the coming UAW corruption scandal, and now Casteel is cooperating with investigations and informing federal officials on how over \$1 million was spent on lavish indulgences for UAW officials.

Casteel sanctioned Freightliner's victimization of five members of the UAW Local 3520 bargaining committee in 2007 who called a strike at the Cleveland plant in response to mass layoffs, the imposition of the hated two-tier wage system, a pay freeze for the

majority of workers and cuts to pension benefits. The bargaining committee had not been aware that the UAW had signed a sweetheart deal with Freightliner in exchange for the company’s “neutrality” over its unionization of the factory.

Within a few hours of the strike beginning, Casteel and the UAW International moved in to squelch it and take over negotiations, bypassing the elected bargaining committee. It then accepted the concessions contract that the bargaining committee had previously rejected. When the membership voted down the contract, the UAW intervened to force a re-vote. After intense threats and browbeating of the membership, the UAW secured ratification on the second try.

The 11 members of the bargaining committee were fired by the company with the tacit agreement of the UAW. Another 700 workers who participated in the walkout faced disciplinary charges. Following the ratification vote, six members of the bargaining committee were reinstated after signing “last chance” agreements, meaning they could be fired for even the smallest infraction. The other five, singled out as the most militant, were effectively abandoned by the UAW.

UAW Region 8 director Gary Casteel told the *Charlotte Observer*, “There are two things a company will take the hardest stance on—workplace violence and an unauthorized work stoppage. They are not going to reinstate them.”

UAW Secretary-Treasurer Ray Curry, a protégé of Casteel, is now the director of the UAW’s Heavy Truck Department. Curry is currently forcing 3,750 workers at the Volvo-Mack Truck factories in Macungie, Pennsylvania and Hagerstown, Maryland to work past the expiration of their contract.

In comments on the Facebook page of UAW Local 171, union president David Fowler said, “When it came in front of the elected negotiators that form the Mack Council as to vote for a strike or to extend the contract, the final vote was to extend. I understand the desire to make a stand and when the time comes the vote to strike will come through the council.”

Volvo-Mack workers cast a near unanimous strike authorization vote. But the last thing the UAW wants is to break the isolation of the strike GM workers. That is why they are forcing Volvo-Mack workers, along with the 110,000 Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers, to remain

on the job even though all workers face the same fight. If truck workers are to fight, they are going to have to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the UAW, to link their struggle together with autoworkers and other workers across the US and internationally.



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