

# UAW pushes through concessions for 3,600 workers at Mack-Volvo Truck

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The United Auto Workers (UAW) has pushed through a concessions contract for 3,600 workers at Volvo-Mack Truck facilities in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Florida after calling off a 12-day strike a week earlier.

The vote on the tentative agreement was this past Sunday, with the UAW claiming that 79 percent of Mack-Volvo workers voted to approve the deal. Many workers are suspicious of the results, as there had been significant opposition to any concessions.

However, many workers who opposed the contract undoubtedly abstained or voted yes because they knew that the UAW would not come back with a better deal in the event of a “no” vote, especially under conditions where it had already called off the strike. Moreover, the vote took place as the union sought to pull the wool over the eyes of workers, who were ordered back to work before they even saw a summary of the deal. They were forced to vote without even seeing the full contract, only a UAW summary of the bogus “highlights.”

The decision to end the strike reflected fears by the UAW officialdom that the strike, which took place in the midst of strikes by 48,000 General Motors workers, 2,000 copper miners in the American Southwest and more than 20,000 Chicago teachers, could coalesce with these and the growing class struggle throughout the world into a powerful working class movement which would escape the control of the bureaucracy.

Now that the contract has been ratified, workers should be on guard against possible victimization of strikers by the company for their social media activity, as took place at GM after the UAW shut down that strike. The UAW did everything it could to stifle a democratic discussion among workers on Facebook, and demanded that strikers not speak to the press or

members of the public on the picket line.

Even though the contract has already been “ratified,” the union has still not released the full contract language. Therefore, the worst parts of the contract are not yet known.

But even the summary released by the union makes clear that this is a concessions contract. The contract provides a measly 6 percent pay increase over the 4 years of the contract, which amounts to a pay cut when inflation is factored in.

The highlights summary continues the practice of allowing the company to schedule work at will. For example, workers can be kept from working their normal Friday shift and forced to work overtime on a Saturday.

The \$3,500 signing bonus and a \$1,000 bonus in the third year are not rolled into base pay. Even though they were added as a means of enticing workers into voting through the contract, the bonuses are largely canceled out by lost income due to the strike.

Most importantly, the summary makes no mention of the two-tier wage system and the use of temporary workers. As with similar omissions in the “highlights” published by the UAW at Ford and GM, this makes clear that the contract paves the way for their massive expansion. The company already employs about 15 percent of its workers on a temporary basis, and is likely to increase that number over the course of the contract.

From the beginning, the UAW sought to sabotage the struggle. It only called a strike after keeping workers on the job for nearly two weeks after their contract expired on October 1. When it finally called the strike, the UAW forced Mack-Volvo workers to subsist on starvation strike pay of \$250 per week and subjected them to an information blackout, even after talks

resumed.

The UAW kept 3,000 workers on the job at Volvo Truck's New River Valley (NRV) plant in Virginia, even though both Volvo and Mack Truck are both subsidiaries of the Volvo Group. The NRV plant operates on a separate contract, with a 2021 expiration date, to prevent workers from joining in a common struggle. The plant was eventually idled due to a parts shortage caused by the strike.

The UAW also worked to prevent the strikers from uniting with the 48,000 General Motors workers who were striking at the same time and 110,000 workers at Ford and FCA who were working without a contract, in a common struggle against the auto and truck manufacturers.

Volvo Group, the second largest truck maker in world behind Daimler Trucks, had global sales worth \$43 billion, and both Mack and Volvo Truck are substantial factors in that total. Last year, Mack Truck delivered 23,520 trucks, up significantly from 19,644 in 2017.

Also last year, Mack secured a \$296 million US military contract to produce 683 armored dump trucks, to be assembled at the Macungie facility in Pennsylvania. At a price tag of over \$433,000 each, the company stands to rake in a substantial profit.

The fact that the UAW forced through another concessions contract during a time when the company is doing well and unemployment is nominally at record lows is further proof that the UAW does not represent the interest of the workers, but is rather a tool of management in containing labor costs.

While sales have been strong this year, the company's order books are falling. Industry-wide, North American truck orders are expected to fall by 100,000 next year, as the demand for heavy-duty trucks returns from temporary highs to the normal levels of around 250,000. This is a factor in the agreement between the company and the union, and why management wanted to maintain "flexibility" through the use of temps.

Throughout the struggle, the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* intervened to encourage workers to break free from the straitjacket of the UAW and form independent rank-and-file factory committees to take the initiative into their own hands.

While the UAW was ultimately able to force through a sellout, the struggle is only just beginning. The shifts

in the workforce caused by the UAW's concessions towards younger, low-wage, temporary workers will continue to generate opposition and new upsurges of militancy. But the urgent task facing Mack Truck workers is to prepare the ground to enable workers to mobilize their strength free from the straitjacket of the unions, through rank-and-file workplace committees.



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