

Mack Trucks to layoff 305 workers at Allentown, Pennsylvania factory

Steve Filips
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The Macungie, Pennsylvania Mack Truck assembly plant announced it would lay off 305 workers on Wednesday. The laid-off workers are members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union.

Mack Truck's public relations manager, Christopher Heffner told media that the layoffs would be effective at the end of next month, February 28. "We regret having to take this action, but we operate in a cyclical market, and after two years of extremely high volumes, we have to adapt to reduced market demand."

The company is projecting a sales decline of at least 30 percent this year, a trend which is mirrored industry-wide. This is due partly to the industry's primary customers succumbing to the effects of higher fuel costs, hikes in insurance coverage premiums, and less demand for shipping as the President Trump's trade tariffs caused the economy to decelerate.

The move comes only months after the UAW's betrayal of the weeks-long Mack Truck strike late last October. The union has been exposed as the bribed tool of management by an expanding federal corruption probe, which has implicated former UAW President Dennis Williams, forced the resignation of his successor Gary Jones, and has now implicated Jones' interim replacement Rory Gamble. The extent of the union's integration into company management was such that even General Motors called the UAW a "wholly owned-subsiidiary of Fiat Chrysler" in a recent lawsuit.

The UAW worked deliberately to isolate the 3,500 workers by keeping 3,000 workers on the job at the New River Valley factory in Dublin, Virginia run by Volvo Truck, Mack Truck's parent company. The UAW accomplished this divide-and-conquer strategy well in advance by keeping workers at Volvo and Mack on separate contracts with different expiration dates.

Moreover, the UAW did nothing to unite Mack Truck workers with the 48,000 GM workers who were on strike at the same time. The UAW shut down the GM strike two weeks earlier, enforcing major concessions on the use of temps, leaving Mack Truck workers even more isolated.

When the Mack Truck strike began to have an impact, revealed when Volvo was forced to idle the NRV plan due to lack of parts, the UAW quickly shut down the strike, and forced through a concessions contract that had been reached behind closed doors.

The shutdown of the strike paved the way for a wave of layoffs at Volvo-Mack. In November, Volvo Truck laid off 700 workers at the NRV plant. The UAW did nothing to oppose these layoffs, and there has been little mention of the layoffs on the UAW's web site or on its social media accounts. The conclusion that should be drawn by workers is that, as far as the UAW is concerned, they are on their own.

There has been a cascade of mass layoffs of workers across the truck manufacturing industry in the last two months of 2019. Daimler Trucks North America, the makers of Freightliner and the Western Star brand of trucks, laid off 900 workers at its two UAW affiliated factories in North Carolina on October 14.

In December, Navistar, which manufactures International Trucks and has 12,300 employees worldwide, announced that it would cut its workforce by an additional 10 percent, for a total of a 25 percent reduction in its workforce in 2019. The layoffs took place at its Springfield, Ohio and Escobedo, Mexico factories, and has resulted in the loss of the second shift at both of its factories.

Even though the layoffs will violate the UAW contract by reducing daily production below 90 trucks per day, the UAW has done nothing to oppose them. In

comments to local media, UAW Local 402 president Chris Blizard, whose local covers the Springfield Navistar plant, attempted to rationalize the firings by claiming, “None of the workers who will be laid off this week have been with the company for more than 14 months.”

This past December 17 Navistar reported profits of \$102 million, which was down from last year’s \$188 million over the same period.

The engine manufacturer Cummins plans to trim 2,000 of its 62,610 workers worldwide in the first quarter of 2020, as it cuts costs in response to lower demand for truck engines and parts.

Another indication of the economic downturn is the increase of trucking industry bankruptcies. Several hundred trucking firms went under in 2019, including larger companies like New England Motor Freight (NEMF), Celadon Group and Falcon Transport.

These cuts underscore the need for Mexican and American workers to unify and to protect their interests against the multinational corporations that exploit them, and work together to bring about an international socialist reorganization of society.

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