

Biden promotes economic nationalism and union-management collaboration at Mack-Volvo plant in Pennsylvania

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Democratic President Joseph Biden toured a Mack Truck facility in Macungie, Pennsylvania yesterday to promote his economic nationalist “Buy American” policy while also issuing demagogic attacks against America’s economic rivals.

“It’s a straightforward solution—support and grow more American-based companies,” stated Biden from the floor of the facility. In addition to touting his administration’s \$973 billion pro-business infrastructure proposal, Biden promoted a \$52 billion initiative to build out America’s semiconductor chip industry. The semiconductor manufacturing industry has been at the center of an economic slowdown that has hit the heavy trucking industry particularly hard this year.

In relation to this latter point, Biden’s remarks attacked China, America’s main economic competitor. Finally, he touted his role, as vice president, in overseeing the Obama administration’s 2009 bailout of the auto industry, which led to mass job cuts and attacks on workers’ wages and benefits.

Prior to the visit, Biden announced a policy meant to facilitate the building of the US domestic supply chain to counter its economic rivals. The rule bolstered parts of the 1982 Buy American Act, which raised the required number of components built in the United States for a product to be considered domestically built and thus able to be sold to the government. The rule raises the cap from the current 55 percent to 65 percent in 2024 and 75 percent in 2029.

The absurdity of Biden’s economic nationalism was underscored by the fact that the factory where he spoke in front of a giant American flag is owned by the Swedish-based multinational Volvo Group, which bought Mack Trucks in 2000. Volvo itself is partially owned by China-based Geely.

Biden made the tour in the company of Mack President Martin Weissburg as well as officials from the United Auto Workers Local 677. Very few workers took part in the exhibition. Workers at the Macungie facility told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the company had cleared the floor of the morning shift for Biden’s visit and instead sent in management in the place of actual workers.

Biden’s visit came less than two weeks after the UAW shut down the five-week strike by 3,000 Volvo Trucks workers at the New River Valley (NRV) plant in Dublin, Virginia. During the strike, workers courageously voted down three UAW-backed sellout deals while forming a rank-and-file committee to prosecute their struggle in opposition to management and the union’s collusion. They won widespread support from the workers at Mack.

On July 11, Volvo declared it would enforce the terms of the third offer, which had been rejected by 60 percent of the workforce. The UAW, rather than opposing this blatantly undemocratic move, sought to give it cover by calling for a revote on the third contract. Workers were told prior to the vote that they would have to accept it and return to work regardless of the outcome.

Biden, who in March of this year publicly backed a unionization campaign at Amazon, said nothing about the Volvo Trucks strike as he stood between company and UAW officials on the shop floor in Macungie.

However, Biden’s decision to visit the Volvo-Mack plant was no doubt animated by a determination to shore up the union-management corporatist alliance, which a faction of the ruling class considers essential in suppressing the class struggle, in the face of a growing rebellion of workers.

In comments to Biden, Mack president Weissburg directly praised the “strong UAW workforce” at the Macungie plant. “We’re all part of the same Mack

family,” he said.

While making oblique reference to “issues” with Mack Truck’s supply chain, Biden and company officials avoided making any mention of the NRV strike. This was despite the fact that last month Volvo officials publicly admitted that the strike was the direct cause of the elimination of shifts at its nearby Powertrain facility in Hagerstown, Maryland.

Biden sought to focus his remarks instead on denunciations of China. “We’re in a race with them,” he declared. “Democracies, not autocracy, will succeed,” he added, without apparently noticing the irony of his remarks given the authoritarian way in which the contract was forced through at NRV. Weissburg supplemented Biden’s nationalism by declaring the need to “support American competitiveness in the global economy.”

Biden’s promotion of “Buy American” nationalism is bound up with an effort to utilize the services of the unions to lower workers’ wages to boost the profitability of manufacturing companies within the United States.

In this regard, Biden’s touting of his role in the 2009 bankruptcy of the US auto industry is significant. In 2009, the Obama administration worked with the UAW to impose the terms of the government bailout on autoworkers. This included the halving of wages for new hires and the creation of the hated two-tier wage system in the auto giants. Since that time, auto companies, including Volvo, have significantly lowered their costs of doing business in the US.

Biden, Mack and the UAW are protecting considerable financial assets in Macungie. According to a Mack Truck newsletter published on the day of Biden’s visit, the company has “completed an \$84 million investment in plant improvements at LVO (Lehigh Valley Operations) in 2020.”

The rank-and-file committee is independent of the pro-corporate UAW, so that workers can organize their own struggle.

According to an article in the *GoErie* online publication, the Lehigh Valley is “Pennsylvania’s third largest metropolitan region” and an arena of critical economic importance. According to the Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation, the region produces a yearly revenue of over \$7 billion in manufacturing alone.

“There’s no better place than the Greater Lehigh Valley to discuss the importance of our manufacturers...” declared Democratic representative Susan Wild in a statement preceding Biden’s trip.

While corporations and the UAW sought to promote

Biden’s trip, workers at the facility were mainly hostile.

“This is all a propaganda show,” said a Macungie worker who is also a member of a newly formed rank-and-file committee at the factory that Biden visited. “Donald Trump did the same thing [when he was president]. He got inside a Mack Truck and honked the horn,” he said, drawing parallels between the right-wing economic nationalism of Trump and Biden.

The worker added that the UAW was a “running joke” at his facility and that a frequent statement heard around the shop floor was that “we have no union” at Macungie.

The struggle at NRV revealed the extraordinarily close international bonds connecting workers, who often occupy similar roles at the same company on multiple continents. This was most clearly demonstrated by the action of Volvo Cars workers in Belgium, who downed tools and began a wildcat strike in early July as the NRV workers prepared to vote “no” on the third contract offer.

Throughout the strike, the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee and the *World Socialist Web Site* called upon workers at Mack Truck in Macungie and nearby Hagerstown, Maryland, as well as in facilities across the planet, to aid the struggle. “If the enemy wants to wage war on us, we must be prepared to open up new fronts in their rear,” declared a statement of the VWRFC in June. During the strike, workers across the world offered statements of support to the striking workers and called for a united struggle.

Despite Biden and the UAW’s efforts for a union-management corporatist alliance, workers at Macungie have closely followed the development of the strike at NRV and have taken critical steps in building their own independent rank-and-file committee to prepare for a struggle independent of the two political parties of big business as well as the pro-company UAW.



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