

Mack Trucks and UAW continue to push for profits at Macungie, Pennsylvania plant after worker dies of COVID-19

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On December 15, 2021, William Domitrovitsch Jr., a worker at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania for over five years, passed away. According to unofficial sources inside of Mack Trucks, Domitrovitsch's cause of death was COVID-19.

"The info was spread around pretty far that he was out with COVID," said a worker inside the plant. "He was forced to work Buck Week [a traditional off-week for hunting enthusiasts] and went out with an ear ache, then it was posted on our local page that he had passed."

Born October 1961, Domitrovitsch was known to family, friends, and coworkers as "Willie Dee." He leaves behind an elderly mother, sister, son and several nieces and nephews, according to an obituary.

The Macungie Mack plant has seen a staggering rise in cases over the past couple months, predominantly from the Delta variant. According to the latest memo issued by Mack Trucks and the UAW, 27 workers tested positive at the facility from December 13 to December 17. The week prior saw 24 positive tests. In total, 562 workers had or have had COVID-19 out of a workforce of just over 2,000. Given the low level of testing across the country, this is likely an undercount.

Domitrovitsch's death was wholly preventable, and the responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of Mack Trucks and the United Auto Workers union. Both the union and the company have regularly worked to conceal the impact of the pandemic and its victims, rejecting any serious efforts to keep workers safe.

"I just feel bad that he won't be able to retire, and he won't be able to enjoy his family anymore," said a Mack Trucks worker to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. The worker denounced the

UAW, which hadn't put "one word or one memo out" about Domitrovitsch of the dangers of COVID-19 and the new Omicron variant.

Mack Trucks has reported "stellar results" in its sales this year, according to an October report in the Pennsylvania-based *WFMZ*. The article noted, "Mack's order intake increased 181% to 13,583 from 4,840 in the third quarter of 2020. Order intake for the first nine months was 30,801, an increase of 167% from 11,557 orders in 2020."

In a statement reinforcing the profit-over-lives policy of the ruling class, Gunnar Brunius, vice president and general manager of Mack Trucks Lehigh Valley Operations, hypocritically claimed the company's commitment "to providing you [Mack workers] with a safe work environment." In the same breath, Brunius declared Mack's plans to "increase production in 2022. ... [w]e all need to work together to make sure delivering trucks to our customers is our top priority." In other words, the "priority" is to save corporate profits, not the lives of Mack workers.

This has all come at a cost. Mack workers have told the *WSWS* that the UAW and management are tight-lipped when workers ask who has been infected or why their coworkers have disappeared for weeks. UAW Local 677's secretary expressed surprise and admitted not even knowing about Domitrovitsch's death when contacted by the *WSWS*. No statement has been forthcoming from the local.

"There's no way anyone can make the argument that he could not have been infected at Mack," said a worker. "When we're running, we're in there for 40 hours a week with no protections in place. ... How many more of us have to get sick or die? This is just totally

unacceptable,” he said.

With the rapid spread of the Omicron variant, cases will continue to explode at workplaces around the state, country and globe. In Pennsylvania, one of the hardest hit states in the Northeast with confirmed Omicron community spread, cases have surged. In the past two weeks cases have increased by 52 percent and hospitalizations by 21 percent.

In Lehigh County, the location of Mack Trucks, the 7-day case average is about equal to last year, before Omicron established its grip in the county. Last year on December 18, the 7-day average was 297, and new cases stood at 233. On December 18 of this year, the 7-day average is 293, and new cases reached 344.

The UAW has done little to combat the spread of COVID-19 at Mack Trucks or in the auto industry. Cases have surged in Michigan, the center of the auto industry, after the UAW co-stamped a return to work last year. The auto industry and K-12 public schools have been at the center of the recent COVID-19 surge which has made Michigan the COVID-19 epicenter of the US.

The endless coverups and collusion between the union and management came to a head at Macungie last summer during the months-long Volvo Trucks strike in Virginia’s New River Valley. The UAW forced Mack Truck workers to stay put while it tried to isolate the 3,000 Volvo workers. The strike was so powerful however that it halted production at Mack, which handles products often from the NRV plant.

Shortly afterward, workers at Macungie formed the Mack Workers Rank -and-File Committee to break the UAW’s isolation tactics. Since its founding, the MWRFC has been the only voice of workers at the Macungie facility speaking on behalf of worker safety in the pandemic.

In August, the MWRFC published a statement calling for COVID-19 protections as Delta variant cases climbed. “To keep us safe, further measures need to be instituted immediately, and we need to be the ones to bring them about,” the statement noted. The MWRFC called for conditions to “allow for safe working distance between each worker” and have a line “run at the speed needed to achieve that. If we cannot do our jobs safely,” then workers must stop the line.

Domitrovitsch’s death underscores the necessity for workers to demand safety measures such as masking,

COVID-19 testing and, if necessary, the complete shutdown of the facility with full pay for workers allocated from the billions in profits made by Mack-Volvo off the labor of the entire workforce.

“The most dangerous thought in there is that it has to be the way it is,” said a Mack Truck worker. “If the blame of Willie’s death can be pinned on Willie by the company or union, then what is to prevent them from doing the same if it happens to one of us?”

The Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee encourages all fellow Mack Trucks workers to write in to join the committee or text 717-739-9517.



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