

Mack Trucks workers vote out UAW leadership at local in Pennsylvania, one year after union betrayal of Volvo Trucks strike

Mack Trucks Workers Rank-and-File Committee

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Mack Trucks workers can contact the Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee by texting 717-739-9517 or emailing MackWRFC@gmail.com.

In local elections last Thursday, workers voted to throw out the top leadership of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 677.

Local 677 elections are usually held a year and a half before the contract at the Macungie, Pennsylvania Mack Trucks plant expires. This is the first election since the UAW-backed sellout of the Mack workers strike in 2019 and the contract which resulted from it.

The two most prominent officials of the local, Walt Smith III (president) and Kevin Fronheiser (shop chair), were ousted for two candidates that are relatively unknown to the majority of the plant floor. Scott Wolf will be the new president and Mark Trezza the new shop chair.

Local 677 covers 2,593 dues paying members over four locations. It comprises 2,234 Mack workers, 145 Americold workers, 118 Mack Reman workers and 96 First Student bus charter workers eligible to vote for the president.

Significantly, there were only 1,624 ballots cast, 26 of which were voided by the UAW local. In total 969 dues paying members abstained from voting, just over 37 percent of the members.

Smith and Fronheiser oversaw the contract negotiations during the 2019 strike which kept in place past concessions workers had made. The contract failed to restore pensions lost in 2009 and the old retirement system that allowed workers to retire in their late 50s.

The contract also failed to abolish the hated six-year tier system that offers only a 1 percent yearly raise to new workers. The previous concessions ending employer-paid health care and adding a points-based attendance

system were not addressed. The contract failed to establish any method of paid sick time at all, or make up for the years of erosion in our relative wages compared to inflation.

This contributed to Mack Trucks' "earnings resilience" throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Martin Lundstedt, CEO of Volvo Group, the parent company of Mack Trucks, in a statement to *Freightwaves* last year. Volvo Trucks saw a "devastating second quarter" in 2020 as the pandemic first spread. However, it was able to report an 8.4 percent profit margin for the year due to "cost flexibility," or the ability to trim costs at the expense of its workers. The Volvo Group was able to fully rebound in 2021, with an 11.3 percent operating margin through October last year, compared to 7.3 percent in 2020.

Mack workers are facing constant downtime due to parts shortages while the company operates at its own discretion for how workers are scheduled. Management is given a free hand to do this without a fight from the UAW.

Workers with less than a year's experience at Mack are contractually ineligible to receive the same sub pay, or pay to compensate for short workweeks, that workers above one year seniority receive during down days. According to the union, it is at Mack's discretion whether or not they extend this benefit to workers below one year of employment.

Numerous candidates criticized the 2019 contract, drawing attention to the numerous violations of the agreement which the local leaders have tolerated.

The recent election comes in the wake of the powerful 3,000-strong New River Valley, Virginia Volvo Trucks workers strike in 2021. That strike was followed closely by thousands of Mack Trucks workers as well as workers

throughout the world. It resulted in the idling of significant operations in the Volvo-Mack Trucks supply chain, including in nearby Hagerstown, Maryland, which builds the engines for Mack Trucks.

The strike resulted in the formation of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, an organization created by Volvo workers with assistance from the *World Socialist Web Site* that was critical in organizing worker resistance to the efforts to undermine their struggle. Volvo and the UAW, facing mounting pressures to fulfill shipment orders, resorted to outright dictatorship methods by ignoring workers' voting rights, forcing through a contract that they had already rejected.

Mack Trucks workers were disgusted by the rotten sellout of the strike and resolved to form their own rank-and-file committee, which pledged to honor and learn from the courageous struggle of their Volvo brothers and sisters.

Several candidates in the election denounced Local 677 leaders for allowing Mack Trucks workers to handle parts shipped to their factory by Volvo scabs during the strike. Others criticized the UAW's corrupt relationship with management.

The electoral routing of Local 677's top leadership occurs amid the background of a mounting class struggle among workers throughout the United States and internationally. Millions are suffering the impact of inflation, which is being caused by the Biden administration's reckless warmongering in Eastern Europe against Russia, and are demanding a fight against efforts to lower their pay.

In addition, the persistence of COVID-19 and the failure of governments to contain the pandemic have resulted in disruptions in supply chains. This has led to numerous slowdowns as well as food and part scarcity.

The vote at Local 677 demonstrates a growing anger and distrust felt by Mack workers toward the UAW bureaucracy. A change in leadership, however, will not change the character of the UAW as a company union. Despite federal intervention, the passage of a referendum allowing for direct election of the international leaders, this is still an organization which is joined at the hip with the auto companies.

This was driven home by the experience this month of 1,300 workers at Detroit Diesel. After an overwhelming rejection of an initial contract and a 98 percent strike authorization vote, the UAW rammed through a deal with only a 10 percent *cumulative* wage increase over six years. Over the course of the contract battle it emerged

that UAW President Ray Curry holds a seat on the board of directors of Mercedes-Benz AG, the parent company of Detroit Diesel.

At Dana Corp, where the UAW similarly refused to honor a strike authorization vote by its members last year, workers have reported rampant contract violations that the UAW has allowed management to carry out with impunity. Meanwhile, the wage gains used to sell the contract to the workforce have been entirely eaten up by inflation.

Autoworkers cannot limit themselves to punishing corrupt bureaucrats in local elections. Instead, they need to organize a fight themselves, to be democratically carried out by workers forming rank-and-file committees to fight against the UAW's betrayals and build up workers' power. Unfair scheduling, the stringing along of newer workers and other violations are all products of the shop floor dictatorship exercised by the UAW together with management across the whole range of its operations.

The social and economic problems workers face go far beyond Mack Trucks or any other single workplace. We need a strategy and an organization controlled by workers which answers only to us and allows us to form ties with other workers, both at Volvo, and internationally. The UAW is the most vicious anti-worker organization because it opposes this fight.

The Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee stands with workers from New River Valley Volvo workers in Virginia to Motherson Automotive Technologies and Engineering plant in India. Corporations don't operate nationally, they operate internationally. Likewise, it is up to workers to rise in brotherhood internationally to combat corporations and improve all of our working conditions.

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