

The upcoming Mack Trucks contract battle, electric vehicles, and the need for rank-and-file committees

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The stage is set for a strike wave of autoworkers. In less than a week, contracts for 150,000 workers at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis are set to expire, and workers have voted by 97 percent to strike. On October 1, the contract covering over 3,000 Mack workers at plants in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Florida will expire.

Like their brothers and sisters at the Detroit Three, Mack workers are determined to win substantial wage increases, job security, better health care, benefits and working conditions, and the elimination of the hated tier system.

“I think \$40 an hour is not a bad ask, at minimum,” a worker at Mack told the WSWS. “With waiting for top rate, that’s insane. I got screwed for that. I had five years of [seniority] lost and I just want these people to make things right. That’s a big one for me. I don’t want benefits touched either. The points system, I don’t like. It’s flawed. That’s it man.”

Another worker said he wanted “more sick days, personal days, and not having to be here for 10 years to get a third week of vacation when we are forced to use our two weeks for shutdown. Wage increase should be in year one, don’t spread it over four, right up front and air conditioning.”

On August 29, Mack management and United Auto Workers officials started “negotiations” on the master agreement. In reality, what deal the UAW bureaucracy brings back will be aimed at boosting the profits of Mack Trucks and its parent company, Volvo Group, at the expense of the UAW membership. Mack workers at the Hagerstown, Maryland and Macungie, Pennsylvania plants have said the UAW is tight-lipped on the details of the contract.

Since the 2019 agreement—signed after the UAW betrayal of the 12-day strike by 3,600 Mack Trucks

workers—profit margins have soared for the international corporation headquartered in Gothenburg, Sweden. According to Macrotrends, Volvo Group’s first quarter growth this year jumped over 28 percent, bringing in \$3.37 billion in gross profit. Annual gross profit in 2022 was \$11.07 billion, almost matching a 2019 high of \$11.11 billion. The current year’s profit is expected to shatter these marks.

Mack Trucks played no small part in the profit surge of its parent corporation. In 2022, deliveries increased 13 percent and net sales grew by 35 percent year-over-year. Market share rose to 6.2 percent for the last quarter of 2022 compared to the previous quarter. The financial analyst website Zippia said annual revenue is \$1.5 billion. The revenue per employee ratio is a staggering \$750,000, demonstrating the grotesque exploitation of Mack workers.

A Mack worker denounced this profit bonanza: “I feel as if everybody in here, plant wide has their salaries paid for, big dogs and all, very early on in the year, off the trucks we make, and the rest of the year, I believe, is just profits. The rest goes to investors.”

One area of particular concern for the global auto bosses, including Mack, is the transition of the industry from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles. The auto corporations view this restructuring of the industry from their cozy, climate-controlled offices and boardrooms as a new gold rush: the slashing of hundreds of thousands of jobs, lower wages, reduced labor costs, additional tiers, and skyrocketing profits. For workers, it will be a jobs bloodbath.

Over the past several years, Mack has begun the transformation toward building electric trucks. The Mack LR Electric was anointed the first electric truck. Production began at the Lehigh Valley Operations in

December, 2021. The Roanoke Valley Operations in Virginia launched the 2023 Mack MD Electric, the second electric truck in Mack's inventory.

Orders for these historic trucks increased five-fold in 2022 from the previous year to 44. Throughout the life of the contract, electric truck orders will only accelerate, reaching into the thousands and tens of thousands. Mack sold 23,632 trucks in 2021 by comparison.

Mack corporate management is ready to spearhead this assault on workers' living standards, using the contract as the opening shot. The company's web site announces that it is seeking to "prepare our workforce for future production needs" and to "invest in the future of Mack" by "increasing line stability, operational flexibility, and performance."

Mack's rank-and-file workers must meet the corporation's global cost-cutting strategy with a global strategy of their own. The first step forward is to throw off the dead weight of the UAW bureaucracy, which is every bit as intent as Mack to ensure the "competitiveness" of the firm by pitting plants against each other within the US and internationally—and by suffocating every stirring of the rank-and-file.

When Mack workers authorized strike action in 2019, the UAW, then led by Ray Curry, refused to call a strike until two weeks after the membership voted for action. The UAW then launched an information black out, repudiating calls to organize solidarity strikes at the Volvo Trucks New River Valley plant in Virginia, as well as appeals to unite Mack workers with the 48,000 striking General Motors workers.

The strike, which lasted less than two weeks, met none of workers' demands. Fearful of the rank and file realizing its inherent power, Curry deployed every trick in the book in order to "pass" an agreement dictated by Mack. Workers were left isolated on the picket line with starvation strike pay of \$275 per week, while hundreds of millions of dollars sat in the UAW strike fund.

Shawn Fain, the newly elected president of the UAW, is being presented as a militant carried into office on a wave of rank-and-file anger against the Curry leadership. In fact, Fain secured only 3 percent of rank-and-file workers' votes in an election that has been documented as a fraud. The only difference between Fain and his predecessor is phony militant talk. Nothing has changed about what the UAW apparatus is—an army of bureaucrats dedicated to the profitability of its corporate "partners." It only took weeks before the new leadership sold out a workers' struggle, the strike by Clarios battery workers in

Toledo, Ohio.

During the UAW presidential election, Will Lehman, a rank-and-file socialist worker at Mack in Macungie, Pennsylvania, ran for union president on a platform that called for the abolition of the UAW bureaucracy and the transfer of power to rank-and-file autoworkers. The UAW worked with the Biden Labor Department and pro-corporate election monitors to deny rank-and-file workers knowledge of Lehman's campaign. Yet Lehman still won the votes of some 5,000 workers.

New centers of rank-and-file power are being developed on the shop floor to fight for the demands of workers. Mack workers first organized the Mack Trucks Workers Rank-and-File Committee (MWRFC) in 2021 to fight for a ban on the handling of scab parts shipped from the strikebound NRV plant.

The committee solidarized with the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee to wage a united struggle against the UAW bureaucracy and the company. Curry deliberately isolated the struggle and forced through a sellout contract by ordering a revote, laced with threats, on the same contract which Volvo Trucks workers had previously rejected.

The MWRFC issued the slogan "Remember the NRV strike," the lessons of which need to be carried forward today if Mack workers are going to win their demands.

Workers must build up the MWRFC for the new contract battle. There is no other way forward. If the corporations have an international strategy to accumulate unprecedented profits, then the working class needs an international strategy to counteract it. This is the strategy and perspective of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), of which the MWRFC is a part. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the *Auto Workers Newsletter* stand ready to help Mack workers to organize this counteroffensive. Contact us today.



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