# Will Lehman issues letter to Mack Trucks coworkers on eve of UAW contract expiration: “We must seriously prepare for a major battle”

**Will Lehman**
**28 September 2023**

*The following statement was released by Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president last year, on the eve of the October 1 contract expiration between the UAW and Mack Trucks.*

*Sign up for text message updates for autoworkers by texting AUTO to (866) 847-1086. Join the next online meeting of the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network to discuss uniting workers in the US and Canada for an all-out strike across the auto industry. Register here to attend.*

Brothers and sisters:

With two days left before our contract expires and after weeks of silence, the UAW local leaderships for all Mack plants have written to the membership to tell us that the company has rejected all our demands. For months, the UAW bureaucrats have said they have been “negotiating.” Now it’s clear they haven’t been negotiating anything all this time, they’ve just been keeping us in the dark to prevent us from preparing to fight back against the company’s ruthless demands.

In a September 28 letter, Locals 171, 677, 1247, 2420 and 2301 wrote, “the company has rejected almost every Union demand of consequence” and are “attacking our job security language, rejected 401k increases, putting everyone into the pension plan, COLA, and all other demands that are important to our membership.” The letter says the company “currently has too many concessions on the table to list here.”

It is clear from their letter that we must seriously prepare for a major battle. We voted 98 percent to strike to win the demands that we need. These should include:

- 50 percent wage increases
- Abolition of tiers
- Fully funded pensions for all
- Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA)
- No layoffs
- Democratic worker control of line speeds and health and safety

The coming battle will determine the course of our lives and those of generations of autoworkers to come. The companies are preparing to lay off hundreds of thousands of autoworkers through the transition to electric vehicles. In order to prepare for this fight, we have to understand the situation we currently face.

We have passed through critical experiences in the last four years at Mack. The cost-of-living crisis has eliminated all wage gains in the past contract. COVID-19 has run through our plants, killing several of our co-workers because the company treats us as less valuable than equipment.

The UAW bureaucracy has allowed Mack to implement a new points system, to change shift times and create dangerous situations in the parking lot, to increase line speed, to pin trucks closer together, to disregard seniority when canvassing jobs, and to keep us working during the Canadian wildfires, which filled our plants with dangerous smoke.

Our contract expires as autoworkers across North America are in struggle against the Big Three. In the past, we have been weakened by UAW leadership which has isolated us and kept us divided against our coworkers at other plants, as evidenced by the fact that

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the UAW bureaucracy had us working on scab cabs when 3,000 UAW members were on strike in 2021 against Volvo at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia.

But now, autoworkers across the country are striving to fight the corporations by harnessing our power as a unified working class. UAW members are currently on strike against the Big Three, ZF in Alabama, Dometic in Pennsylvania, Blue Cross Blue Shield in Michigan and Thrombert in Iowa. The same day our contract expires, thousands of UAW members at the California State University system are poised to strike. Tens of thousands of workers are on strike or have authorized strikes against the entertainment conglomerates, Kaiser Permanente hospitals, and the major casino companies.

But the UAW bureaucracy is doing everything possible to defeat our struggle and block a common fight. Right now, UAW President Shawn Fain is keeping almost the entire Big Three membership working without a contract after they expired on September 15. His phony "stand-up strike" is not a strike at all. It has kept production going at the assembly plants so the companies can keep making profit. This is a definite sign that the "new" UAW president is not a break from decades of pro-corporate collaboration.

How many times are we going to let the bureaucracy sell us out before we stand up for ourselves? It is time we organize ourselves across Mack plants to make certain that we wage a successful strike. If we are to win, we, the rank and file, must exercise control over how this struggle develops.

This means we must establish a Rank-and-File Mack Strike Committee now, before the contract expires, to take power out of the hands of the bureaucrats in Detroit and give it to the workers on the shop floor. All actions from here forward must be taken democratically by the rank and file.

The purpose of this committee will be to ensure that *we*, the rank and file, are able to break the UAW information blackout, share information across shifts and across plants, and democratically discuss what demands we want met in any contract. We will not accept any contract extensions, we will not accept any partial strikes, and we will not allow the UAW bureaucracy to keep us working while our brothers and sisters at the Big Three are fighting to expand their strike into an all-out struggle against the companies.

The conditions we face at Mack confront autoworkers at all the companies, and rank-and-file workers everywhere want to fight. For too many decades, the UAW bureaucracy has told us we must accept what the companies want by giving up what we need. They have used a nationalist strategy to divide us from workers in other countries, and this has proven disastrous. Volvo is a transnational company, and it is time we unite across plants and with our fellow autoworkers internationally to wage a common fight and reverse decades of concessions and givebacks.

In order to fight and win, we have to take matters into our own hands. If you are interested in joining the Mack Workers Rank-and-File Strike Committee, fill out the form below, or call/text me at 267-225-6633.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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