

“Highlights” of UAW-Mack deal reveal sellout contract with below-inflation wage increases

Tom Eley, Marcus Day
4 October 2023

Join the next online meeting of the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network to discuss uniting Mack Trucks and Big Three workers for an all-out strike across the auto industry. Register here to attend.

We want to hear from you: Fill out the form at the end to tell us what you think about the UAW-Mack tentative agreement, and what you think workers should be fighting for.

Three days after pulling the plug, at the last minute, on a strike against Mack Trucks, the United Auto Workers has yet to reveal to workers the full contract that it proclaims to be a major victory.

But what little information the union has dribbled out reveals that the deal is a shameless sellout.

Workers at Mack’s Macungie, Pennsylvania, and Hagerstown, Maryland facilities have shared with the WSWs a contract “highlights” sheet, distributed by the union Wednesday morning.

The “highlights” include a 19 percent wage increase over the life of the five-year contract, with 10 percent of that front-loaded in the first year. That 10 percent increase will not offset the erosion of workers’ wages due to inflation over the past three years, which stands at 22 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. After the initial 10 percent increase, Mack workers’ wages would increase at roughly 2.25 percent per year for the remaining four years—again, below the present level of inflation.

The tentative contract includes no COLA (cost-of-living adjustment) clause and leaves untouched the hated tier system, by which workers doing the same work are paid at substantially different rates. Both COLA and the elimination of tiers have been central demands of workers at both Mack and the Big Three.

In other words, the UAW’s “record” contract locks Mack workers into a significant wage cut in real terms. Workers will come out five years from now, in 2028, considerably poorer than they were five years ago, in 2018.

“The UAW apparatus is still hiding things about this contract, but we know enough to see that it belongs in the garbage,” said Will Lehman, a worker at the Macungie, Pennsylvania, Mack Trucks plant and candidate for UAW president last year.

“I urge my brothers and sisters to turn out the largest possible ‘no’ vote on Sunday, which will send a powerful message that we won’t have another sellout forced on us. Workers should also continue to demand that the UAW release the full contract—we have a right to know every detail of every concession they’ve agreed to and are trying to force on us.”

Every other one of the UAW’s points in the “highlights” is either so vague or so trivial as to have no meaning. The sheet, for example, claims that there will be no increase in weekly health care contributions, but as one angry worker quickly pointed out on social media, the contract says nothing about increased contributions to HMOs. It also promises a \$1,000 annual contribution to 401(k) retirement accounts—for workers who do not have any retirement health care coverage.

Some of the other “highlights” are simply laughable. The contract promises one more week of paid vacation per year, but only for employees who have worked for Mack between six months and three years. The contract also proclaims that it will secure “increased safety shoe allowance.” It does not say how much this “allowance” is, nor does it explain why workers should have to pay for their own safety equipment in the first place.

At the top of the list on the highlights sheet is a \$3,500 signing bonus. Its placement is not accidental. This is standard operating procedure for the UAW, a sweetener to induce financially strapped workers to sign off on rotten contracts. As one worker pointed out on social media, for most workers taxes will slash the miserly bonus by about one-third.

The UAW issued a letter Monday giving its full support to

the miserable deal, writing, “The Mack Truck Council fully endorses this record tentative agreement and look forward to presenting it to the membership.”

“My mind’s made up, I’m voting no”

Workers erupted in outrage against the highlights on social media and in comments to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

“My mind’s made up, I’m voting no,” a veteran Mack worker at the Macungie, Pennsylvania, plant told the WSWS. “I have enough information already to make that decision. It’s just terrible.

“They’re keeping us in the dark, that’s the biggest point that turns me off about the whole thing.

“They’re selling us out. It’s nowhere even close to what we wanted in my eyes. I believe a majority of people at Mack are not falling for their tactics.”

A worker at the Mack parts distribution center in Jacksonville, Florida, told the WSWS, “What we’re seeing wasn’t what we’re looking for. We’re not satisfied.” He said that the wage increase after the 10 percent up-front raise would not meet the high cost of living, and that the “increases” from the last contract were all eaten up by inflation.

In 2019, the UAW rammed through a concessions-laden contract at Mack, shutting down a 12-day strike by Mack workers before they even had a chance to vote on the agreement. The deal maintained the tier system and included a total wage increase of just 6 percent, far below inflation.

“We want to see the contract, let us see every change that the company wants—anything added and anything taken away from us. A \$3,500 bonus? What is that? They’re trying to put the money up to blind people.”

Rick, a member of the Volvo Trucks Rank-and-File Committee at Mack’s sister plant in Dublin, Virginia, said, “Don’t go by just the highlights. They won’t tell you about everything they are taking from you until it’s too late. Don’t let them bully you into a quick decision and vote. See all of the contract! The devil is in the details!”

Workers at the Volvo New River Valley plant in Virginia carried out a courageous struggle in 2021, striking twice and rejecting three UAW-backed sellout contracts. Rick noted that workers at his plant “are intensely watching what Mack workers do, so hopefully they can pull out a victory.”

The UAW is attempting to push through the Mack’s demands after blocking a strike Sunday that was favored by 98 percent of workers.

Ten minutes before the previous contract with Mack

expired at midnight on Sunday night—and with night shift workers having not even started their commutes to the plant—the UAW announced a “last-minute” deal.

Instead of revealing the full contract, as had been demanded by workers, the bureaucracy plans to host a “ratification information meeting” on Saturday at which it intends to present its carefully selected “highlights” to the membership prior to a snap vote on Sunday.

The union’s clear aim, no doubt worked out between new UAW President Shawn Fain and the White House, is to steamroll opposition and prevent Mack workers from joining striking Big Three workers, whose struggle the apparatus is attempting to snuff out in a handful of isolated “stand-up strikes.” The Biden administration’s war policy depends on suppressing the class struggle in the US in general, and in the auto industry in particular—and on continuous production at Mack, which also manufactures heavy military vehicles.

A massive “no” on the UAW’s sellout agreement is necessary, but is only the first step. The union bureaucracy has demonstrated in bringing this miserable deal to the membership that it has not the slightest interest in or intention of meeting workers’ demands. No amount of pressure on a “bargaining committee” that brought back such a blatantly pro-company deal will get them to reverse course.

To take control of the struggle, workers should join and build the Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee, and link up with the growing network of rank-and-file committees throughout the auto industry.

The Mack worker in Florida said he supported the call by the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committee Network for an all-out strike across the auto industry. “It shows more solidarity when everybody moves at once. It’s like a domino effect.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact