Mack Trucks intransigently refusing striking workers' demands, as engines run low at Volvo Trucks plant in Virginia

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Text MACK to (877) 861-4428 for updates and to discuss joining the Mack Workers Rank-and-File Committee today.

Nearly a month into the strike by 3,900 Mack Trucks workers in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Florida, the walkout is beginning to impact the operations of the Volvo Group, Mack's parent company.

Mack workers have been on strike since October 9, after a majority voted "no" by 73 percent to reject a tentative agreement (TA) endorsed by the entire UAW leadership locally and nationally, including union president Shawn Fain. The deal had contained raises that were less than inflation and no cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), as well as weakening job security rules and lengthening the workday.

A leading member of the Volvo Trucks Rank-and-File Committee at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia, told the WSWS that the day shift Monday was canceled due to the strike at Mack, which supplies the Virginia factory with engines.

"Supposedly they are dropping some shifts so they can limp along without running all the way out," the worker said.

Although the Mack and Volvo Trucks plants are owned by the same parent company, they are kept on separate contracts by the UAW. In fact, the tentative agreement proposed by the UAW earlier this month at Mack would have expired one year later (2028) than the current contract at Volvo Trucks, which is set to expire in 2027.

In 2021, Volvo Trucks workers repeatedly rebelled against the UAW's efforts to enforce a pro-company agreement, voting down three UAW-backed deals before one was finally rammed through by a supposed margin of just 17 ballots. A recent *FreightWaves* article noted, "At the time, it was hard to tell whether workers were angrier with their local union bargainers or the company."

While there is an intense desire by Mack, Volvo and all autoworkers to unite their struggles and strike together, the UAW bureaucracy is doing everything in its power to isolate, divide, and weaken workers, and keep them in the dark on the full content of its discussion with management.

The UAW apparatus is particularly concerned to prevent the rank-and-file rebellion at Mack from galvanizing opposition at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis. The UAW leadership has unceremoniously ended its limited "stand up strikes" at all of the Big Three automakers without so much as allowing striking workers an opportunity to review the TA before being ordered off of the picket lines and back to work without an agreed to contract.

What has been revealed of the Big Three-UAW agreements is that they are again sellout contracts, with wage increases of just 25 percent over five years, a "COLA" formula inadequate to keep up with inflation, the continuation of the tier system, and the groundwork laid to decimate jobs during the transition to electric vehicles.

In its latest "update" on Mack, the UAW admitted the company has flatly refused to budge on both wages and COLA. According to the UAW, Mack's "position has not changed: 'If COLA is a must have, our position is no COLA.'" The union notes, "While the parties agreed to schedule additional dates, none are yet on the calendar."

In its own press release, Mack Trucks arrogantly rejected out of hand workers' demands as "unrealistic." Mack stated that while "negotiators were able to reach tentative agreements this week on the four local agreements that were not ratified by UAW members on Oct. 8," higher wages and COLA "continue to be unrealistic."

The media has sought to portray Mack's management and UAW officials as being at loggerheads, stating that official bargaining sessions have been suspended. However, the actual conflict is between Mack and the UAW bureaucracy on the one side, and rank-and-file workers on the other.

The UAW apparatus has parroted the company's claim that the workday must be extended at the Lehigh Valley Operations (LVO) location in Macungie, Pennsylvania. The

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company demands the eight-hour work day be scrapped and extended to eight and a half hours, adding two and a half hours paid at straight time every week.

"They're extending the work day because management is planning to get more done with fewer workers," said an LVO worker to the *World Socialist Web Site*. In a meaningless "improvement," the UAW stated the extension won't begin until 2025 and that "All contractual paid time off including vacation, holidays, bereavement, casual days, will be paid at an additional half hour of pay."

At Local 171 in Hagerstown, Maryland, the UAW claimed management dropped its demand to erode seniority rights, stating, "seniority rights have been restored to the transfer language." The latter issue deals with the "right of assignment," within which the UAW was prepared to allow management to override seniority rights and transfer workers to different positions at will.

However, management is demanding complete surrender on the economic front. "Mack stands by the economic terms of its Oct. 1 tentative agreement with the union. UAW leadership endorsed and called a 'record' contract for the heavy truck industry," the company's most recent statement declares.

In response to management's intransigence, the UAW bureaucracy has put forward no strategy to expand the struggle and lead it to victory. On the contrary, the union apparatus has been operating from the beginning with a strategy to lead the strike to defeat and enforce the company's will.

The rejection of the first TA threw the company and the UAW on the back foot, as both had endorsed the offer and recommended it to the membership. UAW President Shawn Fain declared the rejected TA as a whole to be a "record contract for the Heavy Truck industry" in a statement prior to the vote.

The sellout contract's defeat, which had been campaigned for by the Mack Trucks Workers Rank-and-File Committee, forced the UAW bureaucracy into damage-control mode. A week after the rejection, Fain personally visited the UAW's locals in Pennsylvania and Maryland to try to put out the fire, promising angry Mack Trucks workers more "resources" and "legal support."

In response to Fain's claims to have seen the light, the Mack Trucks Workers Rank-and-File Committee responded by declaring that striking workers "don't need more personnel to keep secrets from us in backroom negotiations. We need our money from the strike fund and control over the contract talks!"

The committee has laid out its demands for a genuine fighting strategy at Mack Trucks, which include:

- All workers at the Big Three be called out immediately
- All negotiations be conducted on the basis of demands that meet our needs, including COLA, far higher wage increases, a complete end to the tier system, a four-year contract and more
- $750 a week strike pay for all workers
- Rank-and-file oversight over negotiations, including daily, detailed reports from UAW officials on what's being discussed with management

Far from accepting these demands, however, Fain's administration has gone in the opposite direction.

As Fain's empty promises have yielded nothing, workers have become increasingly angry over the UAW apparatus' lack of communication and support.

"No COLA, no 40 hour work weeks. That's what the company and the union talked [about for] over a week," said a Mack Trucks worker to the WSWS. "What was discussed in the majority of that time? No one knows because there is still zero transparency in the negotiations," they added.

The worker explained that efforts to reach UAW officials for specific information resulted in very little. "Workers asked the guys coming around to check that we were at our pickets of what news there was, and they said we would know when the union released news." The worker told the WSWS that union representatives had been lecturing workers that "too much transparency is a bad thing," although, "They couldn't specify what too much transparency was."

It is critical that Mack Trucks workers expand their own independent rank-and-file committees to resist the sellout agreement which the company, with assistance from the UAW leadership, is planning to again try to force through.

The success of the struggle depends upon its expansion throughout the auto industry, with workers linked up in a network of rank-and-file committees to coordinate common action. In his recent visit to striking Big Three workers in Detroit, Will Lehman, a socialist worker from Mack Trucks in Macungie and a candidate in the UAW's presidential election, campaigned to build support for this fight.

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