

“Everybody’s pissed off”: Mack Trucks workers return to work following UAW sellout

Nick Barrickman, Bill Schaefer
22 November 2023

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

Days after Mack Trucks corporate managers and the United Auto Workers union came together to force nearly 4,000 workers to accept a sellout tentative agreement at the risk of losing their jobs, workers at the plant described an angry atmosphere and disgust with the UAW.

“We were out there for five weeks. The company knew what they were going to do and the union allowed it,” one worker from Macungie told the WSWs.

On October 15, the UAW bureaucracy rammed through its deal with Mack, claiming it was ratified by 93 percent but providing no vote totals. In the run-up to the vote, union officials and UAW-contracted attorneys served as mouthpieces for the company. UAW reps told workers that they would be permanently replaced with strikebreakers if the contract was rejected a second time and made clear they would do nothing to defend workers against the attacks.

The company’s “last, best and final” offer was virtually identical to the first contract that Mack workers had rejected by 73 percent in October, which had been unanimously endorsed by union officials and UAW President Shawn Fain. The contract contained a below-inflation wage increase of 19 percent over five years and no cost-of-living adjustment raises (COLA).

“Everybody’s pissed off,” another worker told the WSWs. He explained that scabs had “cut all the locks off of all our tool boxes [and] personal boxes... I come in here and half my tools are missing. The scabs were smoking weed and surfing on our personal computers.

“We found out today that [Mack Trucks] paid them \$16 an hour,” the worker said. “But they paid for their housing, their food, their transportation and their flights. Because they hired a company to bring in 850 people and they all sucked.” Managers had been forced to “work in stocking and materials” while the strike was happening, said another worker.

“We should have stayed out two more weeks and made them crumble because Mack Trucks would have had to either close their doors or give us a better offer,” he said.

Mack imposes overtime in aftermath of contract

As at the Big Three, Mack is now preparing to implement plans for speed-up and mandatory overtime following the UAW’s betrayal of the strike.

In a letter released Monday which bore the logos of both the UAW and Mack, workers were ordered to take extended shifts until the end of the year to make up for lost volume.

“Our current circumstances have forced us to skip over 3000 trucks, meaning we pushed them into 2024 or lost the business,” the memo states. “To preserve remaining volume, we approached our UAW partners to discuss options for additional production capabilities” including the elimination of time off for hunting week, a period in the year that has been honored by the company.

“It was a 40-hour week, this schedule will be a 51-hour work week,” said a worker of the new schedule.

“What about the people’s lives in here? They all had plans, now both Mack and the UAW are mandating Saturdays. They could care less about our families and our personal lives,” said another.

In its contract with Mack, the UAW also agreed to extend the workday at the Macungie assembly plant by a half hour at regular pay, a provision which is scheduled to go into effect in 2025. Workers have stated that the extended shift times come as the company is preparing to get more done with fewer employees.

“This isn’t the workers’ fault, this is the union’s fault”

The only organized opposition to the UAW’s collusion with management came from the Mack Truck Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which continuously warned that the UAW apparatus was preparing a betrayal.

“As long as the struggle remains under the control of the UAW bureaucracy, they will isolate us, starve us on inadequate strike pay and make us vote on one sellout after another,” warned the committee in October. The committee called for an all-out strike throughout the auto industry to unite the struggles of autoworkers and put forward demands based on workers’ needs. Will Lehman,

a leader of the committee and candidate for UAW president in last year's elections, traveled to Detroit and northwest Ohio to build support among autoworkers for a joint fight.

"We had [the company] right where we wanted them," said a member of the rank-and-file committee. "This isn't the workers' fault, this is the union's fault. They had four years to prepare for this. The union is just approving all the things the company is asking for now that we're back. Where's our say? The say of the rank and file?"

The massive rejection vote in early October forced the UAW leadership into damage control mode. Fain was obliged to make a visit to the Macungie, Pennsylvania, and Hagerstown, Maryland, locals where he claimed ignorance of the deal's contents and promised from then on workers would have access to "resources" and union support.

This proved to be a lie. As in other struggles, the Mack workers' strike was defeated not due to any lack of determination or willingness to fight, but because of the treachery of the UAW apparatus.

The Mack strike coincided with the struggle of 150,000 UAW members at the Big Three automakers. After decades of UAW-enforced concessions, autoworkers were demanding inflation-busting raises, the return of COLA, a pension and retiree healthcare, as well as the end of tiers which keep workers that do the same jobs at different pay scales based on when they hired in.

Rather than uniting and building the momentum of these struggles, the UAW leaders tried to force through a sellout contract at Mack Trucks while also forcing tens of thousands of autoworkers to keep working without a contract under union president Shawn Fain's bogus "stand up strike" policy. This was followed by an all-out effort to end the strikes as they threatened to expand alongside the mass protests against the United States'-backed Israeli war on Gaza.

In a brazen disregard for its members' democratic rights, the UAW shut down the limited strikes at Ford, GM and Stellantis before workers were shown the contracts, let alone voted on them. On Monday, the UAW declared ratification of all three contracts under dubious circumstances, including accusations of vote rigging and fraud. Despite being universally praised by the UAW, Biden and the media as "record" and "historic" contracts, there existed large opposition to the deals, even according the UAW's official numbers, which showed 47 percent of production workers at GM voting "no."

"Fain did a lot of play fighting for the Big Three, he didn't even do that for us," said a worker from Macungie. "People like me couldn't stay out there financially, we were forced back. We didn't get wages, COLA was out the door. The company got everything they wanted and we got nothing. The union gets our dues every month and that comes out before we can even see that check. So they both got theirs and we got nothing."

A worker explained that because "Shawn Fain called the TA a 'record deal,' the company was able to bring back the same TA again," he said. "That statement hung over our strike" like a cloud, he said.

The strike's impact on parts led to parent company Volvo slowing production at its truck plant in Dublin, Virginia. This was

a replay of a similar occurrence in 2021 when Volvo Trucks workers went on strike. The powerful strike at Volvo Trucks caused Mack Trucks to close its engine plant in Hagerstown, Maryland, as it began losing considerable profit.

"I want to know when the [negotiations team and the company] signed their arbitration agreement. That is what caused us to fold," said a worker, referring to the UAW's decision to end the strike once voting concluded and send any disputes before a courtroom rather than allow the collective power of the membership to force the company to accept their terms.

The worker explained that, under the provisions worked out between the union and management, if he had stayed on strike following the vote, "Mack would have basically had the power to decide if it wanted to give us our jobs back, at a different pay level and position, or if it hired us at all. It would have been able to put in place any parts of the deal it wanted."

Build the Mack Trucks Workers Rank-and-File Committee!

The conditions facing Mack Truck workers demonstrate the need to continue to expand the Mack Trucks Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Throughout the struggle, the committee fought for a strategy for Mack Trucks workers to win. In its most recent statement it declared "real conclusions must be drawn" about the UAW's betrayal:

"Fain claims the 'members are the highest authority in the union,' but for the UAW apparatus this is just words. The Mack Trucks Rank-and-File Committee is fighting for the transfer of power and decision making from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor.

"This is not a matter of this or that corrupt union official. Even newly elected local officials are drawn into the machine of the UAW bureaucracy, which is connected by a million threads to the corporations. That is why our committee calls for the abolition of the entire UAW bureaucracy and for rank-and-file power."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact