COLUMBIA POSTDOCS VOTED 90 PERCENT TO STRIKE. SET A STRIKE DEADLINE AND BUILD A RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEE!



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

Postdocs and associate researchers at Columbia University: on August 23 your local announced that 90 percent of you had voted to authorize a strike, with roughly 850 ballots cast. That vote gave your bargaining committee the power to call a strike, and four days later Local 4100 has neither called one nor named a date by which it will. I support your fight without reservation and call on UAW members everywhere to back it.

My name is Will Lehman. I work at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, and I am the rank-and-file candidate for president of the UAW in this October's election. I am a socialist, and I am running to abolish the apparatus that sits on top of this union and transfer all power to rank-and-file workers.

What you are asking for is modest. Under the contract that has just run out, minimums reached $72,116 for postdoctoral research scientists and scholars and $79,327 for associate research scientists. You have asked for an $80,000 floor, appointments of a year rather than three and six months, childcare support, and housing and transit provisions in the country's most expensive city. Columbia has answered with a one-time increase of no more than 2 percent, annual raises under 3 percent after the first year, and nothing on housing or transit. It closed its last fiscal year with an endowment of $15.9 billion.

Consider what your officials conceded in the last agreement on the central question in this fight. Article 2 gives the University sole discretion to appoint, reappoint or decline to reappoint you and to set the length of your appointment. For the majority of you who are international workers, an appointment is not only a paycheck but the basis of your legal status, exactly what the Trump administration's deportation machine exploits.

It must be stated plainly. Under Shawn Fain the strike authorization vote has stopped being a preparation for a strike and become a substitute for one.

In August 2023, 98 percent of the 962 ballots cast at Columbia authorized a strike, no strike took place, and a tentative agreement arrived hours before the deadline. Earlier this year the UAW kept tens of thousands of University of California academic workers on the job despite a 93.3 percent strike vote, then pushed through a sellout.

In April, student workers in Local 2710 at Columbia voted twice to strike. Region 9A threatened their local with trusteeship unless demands on campus surveillance and police collaboration were dropped; they were dropped, and the International withheld approval anyway.

Your contract ran out on June 30 and your vote closed on August 21, but your local's strike FAQ offers only that when and where to strike is "a determination we will make together," with no date attached. Your appointments, meanwhile, expire on the University's schedule, and for international workers so does the legal status attached to them.

The union's 2025 disclosure to the Labor Department shows what stands behind it. Solidarity House collected $226,524,129 in dues that year and paid out $8.5 million in strike benefits. It reported $1.25 billion in net assets, $856.9 million of it invested through the strike fund. It spent $107.1 million on salaries for roughly 950 staff averaging $112,000, and paid Shawn Fain $276,378. Out of that fund you are offered $550 a week to strike in Manhattan, while 1.44 percent of your gross pay is deducted to maintain it.

In place of a strike you were offered a rally. On June 30, the day your contract expired, Region 9A brought three Democratic congressional nominees to the medical center. Fain's close ally, Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla—a member of the Democratic Socialists of America—was returned to office by acclamation at the June convention with no other candidate nominated, and in February Mayor

Mamdani appointed him to the Rent Guidelines Board. What moves this university is a halt to the research its grants and reputation rest on.

None of this is unique to your campus. It is how this apparatus manages every section of the membership. At Nexteer in Saginaw, Michigan, 1,300 parts workers rejected three UAW-backed agreements and the apparatus refused to call a strike. In New York it has isolated one legal services office at a time. In 2023 the phony "stand up" strike kept most Big Three workers at work. The bureaucracy cannot be reformed. It must be abolished, and the power and resources it holds transferred to the rank and file.

The stakes go beyond your contract. The same government that has unleashed ICE across the country and sent troops into American cities is waging imperialist war all over the world, and this apparatus has lined up behind it. Shawn Fain has publicly backed Trump's tariffs, telling autoworkers their enemy is workers abroad rather than the corporations that exploit them all, while promoting the UAW as the "arsenal of democracy." That nationalism is what leaves your colleagues on visas defenseless. I am the only candidate in this election who opposes US imperialism, who fights for the international unity of the working class against the trade war, and who calls for the mobilization of workers to defend immigrants, abolish the ICE gestapo and stop the drive to dictatorship.

None of that will be won by electing more DSA Democrats. Mamdani presides over a city government that answers to Wall Street, and the officials he draws into it, Mancilla among them, are bound by its limits. The only social force capable of breaking the grip of the financial oligarchy is the working class, organized independently of both parties and across every border. It alone can expropriate the wealth taken from us and reorganize economic life to meet human needs rather than to enrich billionaires and pay for world war. That is what I mean when I say I am a socialist.

To every postdoc and associate researcher at Columbia: Demand a public strike deadline now, and no extension without a vote of the membership. Demand that every proposal and every bargaining session be reported to you in full and in real time, so no agreement can be handed to you as a finished fact. Elect a rank-and-file committee, answerable to you and recallable by you, to enforce your demands independently of the officials.

To every member of Local 4100 at Mount Sinai: You face the same officials in the same local. Insist on a common deadline and a common walkout.

To every academic worker in the UAW: Build rank-and-file committees on your campuses and link them to autoworkers, parts workers and healthcare workers through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), which coordinates them across industries and borders.

To every UAW member holding a ballot: Ballots went out August 21 and are due back by October 5. If yours has not arrived, request a replacement at uawvote.com or by calling 855-433-8683 before September 23. Mine is the only candidacy that proposes to take this union's assets and strike fund out of the apparatus's hands and put them under membership control.

I am asking for your vote, but not to put me in power. I am calling on you to take power yourselves, and a vote for my campaign is a vote to do that. Set a deadline, build your committee, and use the strength those 850 ballots showed.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved