HARPERCOLLINS WORKERS STRIKE: "YOU ARE IN AN IMPORTANT FIGHT THAT EVERY MEMBER OF THE UAW SHOULD KNOW ABOUT"



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

Brothers and sisters at HarperCollins,

I am writing to express my deep support for your strike. You are in an important fight that every member of the United Auto Workers (UAW) should know about. We should all know about your contract expiration and your near-unanimous strike vote. The UAW should be calling for the broadest possible support for your struggle, but in fact, they have made no mention of it. They should have organized a fight a year and a half ago when your last contract expired. But instead, the union bureaucrats have been stringing you along because they don't care about you.

There's a reason that 99.5 percent of you voted in favor of a strike. Everyone recognizes that conditions are simply intolerable. Your situation is like that of the workers at the auto parts companies Ventra and Tenneco. I am sure that your wages and theirs have similar buying power: in other words, it's not enough to make ends meet. These are the conditions under capitalism. The system is organized to benefit billionaires like Rupert Murdoch, who owns HarperCollins, and Shahid Khan, who owns Ventra. The companies have plenty of money—HarperCollins made record revenues last year—but they're not willing to pay workers. That can't be allowed to stand.

The UAW bears responsibility for this inequality because it is helping the companies to exploit workers. Right now, it is allowing our fellow members at Ventra and Tenneco to be isolated. And the UAW's bargaining terms are entirely separated from what workers need.

That's why bargaining must be put into the hands of the workers. The result of closed-door negotiations is always a betrayal. The reason the UAW wants the doors closed is because nothing good is going on behind them. If it were, they'd be proud of it. Negotiations must be fully opened to HarperCollins workers.

When your contract expires, that's the signal to fight. No contract, no work. Your contract expired in December 2020 and was extended for a year. Extensions of outdated and undesirable contracts only benefit the company; they do not benefit the workers. The UAW is perfectly okay with that. Even when the extension expired last December, the UAW did not call a strike.

That is because when you strike, you don't have to pay dues. The bureaucrats are willing to do whatever is necessary to keep workers on the job and paying dues. Their number one priority is protecting that strike fund as if it were their own private property. But it's not! It's workers' dues money. As far as the UAW is concerned, the one-day strike that Local 2110 has called is just an effort to allow you to vent. It is not an effort to mount a real fight against HarperCollins. But you have bigger things in mind than that.

If the UAW were serious about representing you, it would conduct a strike for as long as necessary and back the strike financially. It would be providing you with every asset available, including opening up its $800 million strike fund, to help you win this fight. It

would call out other UAW members and other workers to support you and broaden the strike as much as necessary to win.

But the union's not doing any of these things. On top of that, if you were on an indefinite strike, you would get $400 per week in strike pay. That certainly is not enough to live on in New York. When you're out on strike, the company gets full pay, and the UAW executives get full pay. The workers are the only ones who don't! This needs to change.

The UAW is not operating in your best interests, but you don't need to listen to their instructions about the "right" way to conduct a fight. Instead you need to take matters into your own hands. You should form a rank-and-file committee to conduct a real fight, independent of the bureaucracy and composed of rank-and-file workers.

This type of organization would provide you with the means to democratically control your own struggle, in opposition to the betrayals of the bureaucracy. It would also give you the means to appeal for broad, international support from workers all over the world. HarperCollins management is in touch with Murdoch in Australia, and there's no reason that you can't communicate with workers elsewhere as well. Knowledge of your fight needs to spread, because a lot of workers would support you if they knew about your situation. But this is not going to happen under the UAW's direction. Get in touch with other workers and get the word out.

The fight of workers anywhere is the concern of workers everywhere. An injury to one is an injury to all. The outcome of your struggle affects conditions for other workers, whether they realize it or not. You and I are in different industries, but we are all UAW members. But you can't keep relying on a union apparatus that has proven itself, time and time again, to be working against your interests. A fight needs to grow if it's going to win. The only way your fight will be won is if you conduct it independently and to broaden it by reaching out to other workers.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved