SUPPORT THE HARPERCOLLINS STRIKE!



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

Brothers and sisters at HarperCollins,

I am writing to reiterate my support for your struggle, which has reached a crucial point, and to appeal for the broadest possible mobilization of workers in the UAW behind your fight.

You have been without a contract since December 2021, when the one-year extension of your previous contract expired. This means that your wages have stagnated since 2020, even as inflation has reached 8.2 percent. Like autoworkers and workers in every other industry, you are struggling to pay bills, buy groceries and pay for transportation to work.

Except for a one-day strike on July 20, which you supported by a margin of 99.5 percent, the United Auto Workers (UAW) apparatus has kept you on the job for almost 11 months. What gains can the UAW bureaucrats say they have made by putting off the fight for this long? Do you feel that you have won anything from this strategy?

Striking HarperCollins workers in July

When a contract expires, that is the signal to fight. But when your contract expired in December 2020, the UAW simply extended it. When the extension expired, the union kept you on the job. This has only worked to the benefit of HarperCollins, which reported revenue of $2.19 billion in fiscal year 2022.

Now the UAW has set a new strike date, only to postpone it as the date drew closer. You should be warned: The union apparatus has done this before. One of the UAW bureaucracy's classic tactics is to string us workers along until they have gotten the wording right on a sellout agreement with the company. Then the bureaucrats abruptly announce a tentative agreement before a fight can begin. They frequently send us back to work before we vote on the full contract, as they did to Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia in May 2021.

The union executives have even more frequently refused to show us the whole tentative contract before we vote on it, which is not only absurd, but also violates our democratic rights.

Why does the UAW apparatus betray us like this? Because it is run by a privileged bureaucracy whose primary concern is to maintain its own comfortable position. There is a vast disparity between the living standards of the people in Solidarity House, the UAW's headquarters, and those of the workers who struggle to make ends meet in expensive cities like New York. The UAW bureaucrats' lifestyles have nothing in common with those of the workers.

For decades, these so-called representatives have maintained their privileges by helping the companies to suppress strikes, cut wages and benefits and eliminate jobs. The only reason workers are even able to vote for the UAW's national officers this year is because of the sprawling corruption scandal, which sent two former UAW presidents to prison for embezzling dues and revealed other top officials to be bribed by the companies.

While a few of the most egregious criminals may have gone to jail, the pro-corporate apparatus remains, and is not going to lead any kind of fight on behalf of the workers.

But this bureaucracy is not all-powerful. Over the last two years, a rebellion has erupted among workers against further concessions, resulting in overwhelming votes by the rank and file to reject

contracts fully endorsed by the UAW apparatus at Volvo Trucks, auto parts makers Dana and Ventra, John Deere, Detroit Diesel, and Columbia University.

Your needs are not so different from those of autoworkers. Like you, Ventra auto parts workers in rural Evart, Michigan get wages that aren't adequate to the cost of living in their area. You need cost-of-living increases and raises large enough to make up for past concessions. You need pensions that will enable a decent retirement. You need to be able to afford to live in the city where you work, which is one of the most expensive in the country.

Winning these demands is not going to come easy. It's going to take a massive fight against HarperCollins and its billionaire owner Rupert Murdoch—a fight that workers at HarperCollins cannot win alone. It's going to require a struggle that is coordinated with workers in every industry, from UAW academic workers at NYU, the New School, Columbia and other New York universities, to workers at Mack Trucks in Pennsylvania, where I work, the Big Three auto industry, and elsewhere.

We, the workers, are the only ones who can wage a genuine struggle. I'm running for UAW president to take the power back from the UAW bureaucrats and give it to the rank and file. My platform calls for taking the fight against these corporations into our own hands. We can't rely on the same apparatus that has failed us for decades.

HarperCollins workers need to form a rank-and-file committee to take the leadership of the fight against exploitative conditions into your own hands. I call for the broadest possible support of your fight from workers everywhere. Your fight is every worker's fight. An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us —and should be repelled by all of us.

All the bargaining with HarperCollins and the other companies must be done under the supervision and control of rank-and-file workers, livestreamed so that all workers can be fully informed and participate in the decisions that will affect their livelihoods.

If the companies aren't going to meet our demands, then we should be able to fight. In any strike, the UAW should back us with its enormous assets, including the $800-million-plus strike fund. We paid dues, and we should be able to control these assets directly and democratically.

It doesn't matter which industry you work in, or whether the billionaire owner of the company where you work lives in America or Australia. We're facing a battle against capitalism. We must connect our fights everywhere and broaden them until we win what we need. The other candidates for UAW president prefer to bargain, beg and accept whatever the company allows us. But these companies exist because of our labor. We must fight for a better life, and that means we must abolish the profit system and reorganize society to satisfy human need.

Brothers and sisters, we already have the power to make the necessary changes. Our task is to organize on an international basis to realize our goals. To tell my campaign about the conditions and problems you face, and for assistance in organizing a rank-and-file committee, contact me today at willforuawpresident@gmail.com.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved