MOBILIZE THE WORKING CLASS BEHIND STRIKING CNH WORKERS!



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

Dear brothers and sisters,

As candidate for president of the United Auto Workers union, I call on autoworkers and other sections of the working class to mobilize in support of the 1,000 striking CNH workers in Wisconsin and Iowa. It is the responsibility of workers everywhere to come to the aid of this critically important struggle and break through its isolation.

CNH workers, who are in the UAW, have demonstrated enormous courage and determination. Workers launched their strike—the first in nearly 20 years—on May 2, and they have now held out for more than four months.

Workers at CNH have taken a stand and are saying now is the time to finally reverse the long-term decline in wages, benefits and working conditions.

Autoworkers, workers at Mack Trucks (where I work), and other workers in the UAW will easily recognize the problems CNH workers confront: Years of stagnating pay. Wages rapidly eaten up by inflation. Rising health care costs. A tier system which divides workers. And endless demands by the company for mandatory overtime and production speedup.

CNH has responded arrogantly and ruthlessly to workers' just demands, reviving the old methods of strikebreaking and class war. The company has cut off workers' health insurance and brought in scabs in an effort to maintain their operations in Racine and Burlington.

Management has made clear it is intransigent. Their most recent proposed raises would amount to significant pay cuts with inflation taken into account, not to mention the higher health care costs they are demanding. Nor would their proposal restore COLA raises, which are urgently needed to keep up with the rising cost of living, or pensions.

The bosses are saying there's no money to provide workers with a decent standard of living, but we all know that's a ridiculous lie. CNH, like virtually every other major corporation, has made immense profits over the last two and a half years of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to their last earnings report, net income was nearly $1 billion for the first half of this year, and revenue was over $10 billion, both up from 2021.

While refusing to provide for workers, CNH management is funneling huge amounts of money to its investors, launching a 100-million-euro share buyback program earlier this year.

THE UAW BUREAUCRACY IS SABOTAGING THE STRIKE

Even though CNH workers are fighting a battle against a bitter and experienced opponent, this struggle is still winnable. But the reality is that this strike is being sabotaged by a UAW apparatus which has become totally unaccountable to the will of its members.

The problems workers face—the tier system, stagnant pay, long hours, lack of a secure retirement—are all consequences of earlier sellouts pushed through by an unaccountable bureaucracy. For years, the corrupt UAW officialdom blocked strikes and forced through concessions contracts, claiming it was the best we could get. Meanwhile, they were taking bribes from the companies and embezzling our dues, as the corruption scandal revealed.

I'm sure many CNH workers are well aware of and outraged by what happened at the UAW convention this summer. After delegates initially voted to raise strike pay to $500 a week (still an inadequate amount), the ruling clique intervened, and held a revote to lower weekly strike pay back down to $400 at the end of the convention. Top UAW officials were reportedly concerned that even that modest $100 increase would too quickly drain the $800-million-plus strike fund, which they have long used as their personal piggy bank.

The fact is that the highly paid officials at "Solidarity House" are deliberately trying to starve out workers on the picket line in order to wear down workers' resistance and prepare the ground for pushing through a contract which meets none of their basic needs.

BUILD A RANK-AND-FILE MOVEMENT TO WIN WHAT WORKERS NEED!

I am running as a candidate for UAW International president in order to build a mass movement of rank-and-file workers to sweep away this unaccountable bureaucracy and place power back in the hands of workers, where it belongs.

The efforts to isolate and sabotage the strike at CNH must be ended, and workers provided all the resources they need to wage a real fightback against the company. I call for strike pay to be raised to workers' full income. The strike fund was created with our hard-earned dues, and that money must be used to support our struggles. The only ones opposed to raising strike pay are the UAW bureaucrats who live like parasites off our labor.

My campaign is advancing a definite set of demands based on what workers and their families actually need, not what the companies claim is affordable. These include:

- 50 percent pay increases for all
- No layoffs or plant closures
- Abolish the tiered system
- Return of COLA
- Full pension funding
- 8-hour day/40-hour week
- 3X overtime pay

In order to fight for and win these demands, I'm advocating for workers to form rank-and-file factory and workplace committees. We have to have a way to communicate with each other, share information and coordinate our struggles. These committees will provide a means to do so.

I also support the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, which is a global network of workers who are building these committees. For too long, we've been told that workers in other countries are to blame for the problems we face. But we can't fight against massive, multinational companies like CNH, Volvo-Mack, or the global automakers without having an international strategy of our own, and the support of our brothers and sisters around the world.

The UAW apparatus has trotted out any number of Democratic Party politicians as supposed "friends of labor." But the Biden administration is just as much beholden to the corporations as Trump and the Republicans are. Most recently, the White House intervened in the national railroad contract struggle, establishing a Presidential Emergency Board to block a US-wide rail strike and recommend a deal which meets virtually all of the rail companies' demands.

Our allies are not the big-business politicians, but the millions and millions of workers who are looking for a way to fight against high inflation, low pay and intolerable working conditions, from Deere and Caterpillar workers, autoworkers and Amazon workers, to nurses, railroad workers and others.

In their historic strikes last year, the John Deere and Volvo Trucks workers showed us the way forward. At Volvo, workers voted down at least three UAW-endorsed tentative agreements, while the Deere workers voted down two, most of them by 90 percent margins. The major factor in workers standing together in such unity and insisting that they deserved better was the formation of rank-and-file committees early in their struggles.

At CNH, workers also took the important step earlier this year to found their own rank-and-file committee, laying out a series of demands based on what workers need. I urge workers at CNH to join and build this committee, to link up with this growing rank-and-file rebellion, and to expand and win this strike. To learn more about getting involved with a committee and join this fightback, contact my campaign 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