AT UAW MONITOR'S VP DEBATE, SOLIDARITY HOUSE CANDIDATES LIE ABOUT ELIMINATING TIERS



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

Watch me debate UAW President Will Curry and other candidates for president Thursday, September 22, at 6:00 p.m. EDT. You can watch the debate at youtube.com/watch?v=2TAY1d9nihY.

In the UAW vice presidential debate Monday night, I heard the most outrageous lies from Chuck Browning, Bryan Czape and other members of the Solidarity House bureaucracy running on the same slate as my opponent in the presidential race, UAW President Ray Curry. One of the biggest was the claim that the UAW has eliminated tiers at the Detroit automakers as well as at Volvo, Mack Trucks and other heavy truck makers.

The UAW Vice Presidential debate, September 19, 2022

Excuse me, I am a second-tier worker at Mack Trucks, so I can assure you the tiers have not been eliminated here. My brothers and I must work side by side doing the same work for less money as senior workers and only reach top pay after six years. In fact, employees are on multiple tier progressions in my plant. On some, you can work for four years and not get a $1 an hour increase, if you are lucky enough not to get laid off.

Not only are there wage tiers, there are pension tiers. You used to be able to retire at full pension with 85 points (years of service plus age). The UAW gave that away long ago. New employees no longer get pensions, only much inferior 401(k) plans. Basically, this means you save your own money so someone else can gamble it, and Mack will match some of what you put in.

At GM, new hires still take eight years to reach top pay. Virtually all new employees hired at GM and other Big Three plants are now temps or “Supplemental” workers with no contract rights, no paid time off and making a starvation $16.67 per hour. These workers must work two years without being laid off to make it to full-time. Starting pay for new full-time workers at GM is now just $18.04 an hour.

A temp worker at the GM Flint Truck Plant told my supporters last month that many of his coworkers had been working as temps for much longer than two years, because if a temp worker is laid off for 31 days, the clock resets to zero.

He said: “Despite workers of every tier doing the same work, temps and those without seniority are paid substantially lower wages and receive little or no benefits aside from the most rudimentary health care plan compared to their seniority and legacy counterparts.

“In addition to the insulting pay inequality is the fact that part-time workers are only given 24 hours of unpaid time off a year, but only after working a minimum of 12 continuous months. Part-time temps do not have a guaranteed and stable work schedule either, necessitating a second full-time job for many.”

When he heard what Browning said, a worker at the Toledo Jeep plant said, “That’s a lie. Tier ones get pensions, tier twos don’t. Anyone made full-time after the last contract tops out at a dollar less per hour. That also means they don’t consider Supplementals as a tier, they don’t consider us as workers really.”

A worker showing support for my campaign at Toledo Jeep

Workers should also recall that the Curry leadership orchestrated the defeat of a resolution at the 2022 Constitutional Convention that would have banned the negotiation of a tiered wage structure in all future UAW contracts. If they actually thought tiers were already eliminated, why would they have opposed this resolution?

In addition to in-progression and temp workers, there is another set of tiers: the subcontract workers who are doing jobs at the Big Three at vastly lower pay rates and are not covered by the national agreement. The UAW has not only sanctioned the use of contract workers, but it has encouraged their use to increase “competitiveness.” This

past July, the UAW negotiated a contract for GM Subsystems workers that maintains these workers at poverty wage levels, with temp workers hiring in at $15 an hour and maxing out at just $22 after six years. The UAW told Subsystems workers that if they voted down the contract and struck, the union would order GM workers to cross their picket lines!

It is also important to be aware that full-time senior autoworkers have not had a real wage increase in years. The 2019 national auto agreement contained two 3 percent wage increases and two lump sum bonuses. All of that has been eaten up by inflation.

When my supporters were in Toledo recently, a worker at the Stellantis Jeep plant told them, "I'm making the same thing that my brother was making here back in 1986."

In fact, I did some calculations based on the Consumer Price Index, and top-tier UAW autoworkers at the Big Three are making substantially less in real terms than they did in 1979. If the UAW had maintained the three percent annual improvement factor in 1979 and the full cost of living allowance, the standard base pay would have risen from $9 an hour to over $100 an hour in 2022.

Browning also had the gall to claim that the contract he helped negotiate at John Deere was the "best in decades," when it did not meet workers' demands for a substantial wage increase to make up for decades of pay freezes and concessions and when it left retirees in the lurch by failing to restore health care for all retirees.

If it was truly the "best contract in decades", why was the UAW forced to strong-arm workers into accepting it with threats of retaliation? Why did Deere workers reject Browning's "best" contract twice, before having it rammed through on a revote? Why did the largest local at Waterloo, Iowa vote down the contract even a third time? To say this was the best contract they ever negotiated speaks volumes against Curry and Browning and the rest of Solidarity House.

As one Deere worker said after he heard Browning speak, "Yes they tried shoving that contract down our throat… BS is what I say. They are a bunch of liars; don't believe any of them."

At John Deere, to the extent there were any improvements made, it was because workers rebelled against the UAW bureaucracy's repeated attempts to force another concessions contract through and organized a rank-and-file committee.

And this leaves out of the picture our brothers in the auto parts industry that the UAW has abandoned. In the 1980s, auto parts workers still made on average 80 to 90 percent of the pay of workers at the Big Three. At the Ventra Evart parts plant in Michigan, the UAW refused to call a strike earlier this year, in defiance of what workers were demanding. One International rep told workers that they could not get higher wages because "You're not the Big Three."

One more point on Browning's lying performance. He said that he was "fighting for workers at Case." Really? The UAW has hung striking Case New Holland (CNH) workers out to dry for five months, isolating them from the other UAW members and starving them on $400 strike pay.

Monday's debate showed the futility of trying to reform the bureaucracy at Solidarity House. It is not a matter of shuffling in a few faces but clearing out the whole apparatus, which has completely lost any connection to rank-and-file workers.

We need to discuss a strategy to reverse the decades of givebacks and win what workers need, not what management says it can afford.

My campaign is running to put the rank and file in power and abolish, not reform, the UAW bureaucracy.

If workers want an end to all tiers and wage progressions by bringing up lower tiers to top pay and benefits, and all temps to full-time pay and benefits, with full funding of pensions and high-quality health care for all current workers and retirees, they should support my campaign.

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JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

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