

UAW tries to shut down Volvo Truck strike in Virginia as Columbia University grad students vote down union-backed sellout deal

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Workers at Volvo Truck in New River, Virginia have erupted in outrage over the attempt by the United Auto Workers to shut down their powerful strike aimed at regaining past concessions. On Friday the union announced it had reached a tentative agreement on a five-year deal and ordered the 3,000 workers to take down picket lines and prepare to return to work Sunday without releasing any contract details.

The Volvo settlement was announced the same day that graduate student teaching assistants at Columbia University in New York City voted down a sellout deal the UAW affiliate on campus had attempted to impose on them.

At Volvo, workers are determined to win back wage and benefit concessions handed over by the UAW in the last three contracts under conditions where the company is enjoying booming profits, \$1 billion in the first quarter of 2021 alone.

One outraged worker posted on the UAW Local 2069 Facebook page, “You have almost 3000 members demanding answers. This is your job. This is what you are paid to do. We should not have to go to work on an agreement we do not agree on. We voted to strike for a reason. Not to make corporate and UAW jobs easy. We made SACRIFICES. WE STOOD IN THE RAIN AND FREEZING TEMPS. WE THE MEMBERSHIP DESERVE IMMEDIATE COMMUNICATION.”

The Volvo strike takes place one year into the pandemic that has seen up to one third of the workers at the plant infected, while Volvo CEO Martin Lundstedt made \$5.2 million in compensation last year. The UAW has overseen the continuous operation of the plant under conditions where even token safety measures are not enforced.

Volvo workers are suffering under the impact of a series of corrupt sellout deals negotiated by UAW officials, some of whom have been caught up in the union’s massive corruption scandal.

The same day as the UAW attempted to shut down the Volvo strike, graduate student workers at Columbia University voted to reject a sellout deal by the UAW-affiliated Graduate Workers of Columbia (GWC). The vote was 1,093 “no” to reject and 970 “yes.” The vote is a devastating blow to the credibility of the UAW and the GWC, who put enormous pressure on graduate students to endorse the sellout deal in order to isolate graduate student workers at New York University, who walked out earlier this week.

The grad students are fighting to win a decent pay increase in order to offset the enormous cost of living in New York City. From the start, the UAW-affiliated Graduate Student Organizing Committee worked to keep the struggle at the two schools separate, shutting down the walkout by grad students at Columbia at the same time NYU instructors were hitting the picket lines.

The fight by Virginia Volvo workers and New York grad students takes place in the context of a series of important strike battles around the US.

- In Alabama, over 1,000 coal miners at Warrior Met are continuing a strike that began April 1. The workers are determined to win back concessions surrendered by the United Mine Workers of America five years ago as the company emerged from bankruptcy. In an inspiring display of solidarity and determination, Warrior Met miners voted down a sellout contract brought back by UMWA President Cecil Roberts by a vote of 1,006 to 45.

- Some 1,200 Steelworkers in five states are continuing a walkout against Allegheny Technologies, Inc. (ATI). The workers have not had a pay raise since 2014 and the company is attempting to impose further concessions, including completely inadequate raises and raising health care costs. The United Steelworkers is seeking to keep the ATI workers isolated while it pursues its bankrupt strategy of calling the walkout an “unfair labor practice” strike. Meanwhile, workers are receiving a miserly \$100 per week in strike assistance.

- ExxonMobil is threatening to lock out 650 workers at its Beaumont, Texas refinery on May 1. The company is demanding that the United Steelworkers put to a vote its concessionary contract before it will resume talks. For its part, the USW is doing nothing to mobilize support for the workers. Instead, it is collaborating with management to ensure an “orderly” transition by management to a scab labor workforce in preparation for the lockout.

- In Massachusetts, 700 nurses at St Vincent Hospital in Worcester are continuing a strike for safe patient staffing ratios. The nurses are resisting efforts by the Massachusetts Nurses Association to isolate and wear down the strikers, who are receiving broad public sympathy and support.

- Following a 92 percent strike authorization vote, some 200 faculty at Oregon Institute of Technology went on strike April 26 for a new contract. The walkout is the first strike by university faculty in Oregon history.

- Eighty-four health care workers are striking against grueling work conditions at Tyler Memorial Hospital near Tunkhannock, Pennsylvania outside of Scranton.

In addition, there are continuing job actions by teachers and autoworkers against the homicidal “herd immunity” policies of the ruling class that have forced workers into unsafe factories and schools in the midst of an uncontrolled pandemic. On Thursday, teachers in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, a suburb outside of Detroit, staged a sickout over the school administration’s imposition of relaxed rules over social distancing. The wildcat action follows a protest last month by trim workers at the Stellantis Jefferson Assembly plant in Detroit over the UAW/management cover-up of COVID-19 cases at the massive facility.

These struggles in the United States take place amid a mounting tide of struggle by the international working

class, including dockworkers in Montreal, Canada; bus drivers in Manchester, England; and public transport workers in the Indian state of Karnataka.

The fight by workers is more and more taking the form of a direct rebellion against the corrupt and bureaucratized trade union organizations that serve as enforcers for management and the capitalist elites. In over one year of the pandemic, in no country have the unions organized resistance to the criminal policy of “herd immunity” or the massive state handouts to the rich.

To organize a fight back, workers need new organizational forms corresponding to the international character of the class struggle, based on a program of uncompromising resistance to the demands of the ruling classes. Flowing from the nature of modern technology and communication, there is an objective need to coordinate their fight across industries and across oceans and national borders.

In the US, Britain, Germany, Sri Lanka and other countries, workers with the support of the *World Socialist Web Site* have already established networks of rank-and-file committees to share information and coordinate and organize struggles against the policies of the corporations and capitalist governments.

To expand and carry forward this work, the WSWS and the International Committee of the Fourth International are initiating the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). It will be a means for workers to coordinate their struggles globally, fight for the shutdown of nonessential production, support for the unemployed and all the measures necessary to halt the pandemic, which are being resisted by the ruling class due to national rivalries and profit considerations.

Above all, the unification of these struggles requires the building of a socialist leadership in the working class. We encourage all readers of the WSWS to register and take part in the international online May Day rally set for Saturday. Please register here.



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