

Volvo Truck workers oppose concessions deal pushed by UAW

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We urge workers to contact us at autoworkers@wsws.org to prepare a struggle to defeat the sellout agreement and broaden the fight.

Anger is growing among workers at Volvo Truck's New River Valley manufacturing plant in Dublin, Virginia against the United Auto Workers' acceptance of deep health and pension cuts and the continuation of the much-hated multitier wage system.

Last Friday, the UAW abruptly shut down the two-week strike by 3,000 workers at the factory and ordered them to report to work Sunday night without seeing, let alone voting on, the new five-year deal. Workers will not have a chance to vote on the deal until May 16.

After the third shift left work at 6:00 Monday morning, workers went to the union hall to demand that Local 2069 officials release information about the contract. According to an account provided to the World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter by several workers, more than half of the 125 skilled trade workers who went to the hall bypassed the area where workers were collecting strike benefits and went searching for local union leaders.

After looking for and failing to find Local 2069 President Matt Blondino, the workers confronted Bargaining Chair Greg Shank and "the situation immediately got very heated," one worker said. "We all gave them hell for sending us back to work without a contract, but Greg Shank's defense was that Ray Curry and the UAW International made the final decision and our local could not go against it."

Shank reportedly told workers that Curry, the UAW Secretary-Treasurer and head of the union's Heavy Truck Department, claimed he "didn't want people out of work hurting for money and if the contract got voted down on May 16, we would just go on strike again." Shank told the workers that local officials really wanted

to continue the strike until a vote on the deal, but Curry escorted them out of the negotiating session in Charlotte, North Carolina and told them in no uncertain terms that the Volvo workers were going back to work.

Such a flagrant violation of the democratic rights of rank-and-file workers has long been the modus operandi of the gangsters who run the UAW. Curry shut down the 2019 strike of Mack-Volvo workers in a similar fashion. The UAW is notorious for using intimidation, lies and ballot stuffing to push through sweetheart contracts, and its leaders, including the last two presidents, have been indicted for taking company bribes and embezzling union funds.

In 2008, the UAW betrayed an eight-week strike by Volvo workers and agreed to a multitier wage system modeled on the one it imposed on autoworkers the year before. The last three UAW contracts have helped Volvo reduce its labor costs by at least 25 percent.

But the Local 2069 officials are no innocents. They have done the bidding of the company and the UAW International for years, including agreeing to scrap hundreds of grievances over unpaid overtime, leading to the loss of some \$2 million for workers. Blondino, Shank and the rest of the local leadership are just as frightened by the prospect of Volvo workers breaking free from the grip of the UAW to fight for their livelihoods.

Trying to intimidate the workers, Shank said if they tried to continue a strike not authorized by the UAW they would "be on their own," would receive no strike benefits and that Volvo would "terminate them."

Undeterred, the workers demanded that the bargaining chairman hand over a copy of the tentative agreement, but he refused. Nevertheless, the workers insisted on taking cellphone photos of the different pages of the contract he was holding in his hand and the

union official had no choice but to let them.

What workers uncovered is that this deal is no different from the previous sellout agreements signed by the UAW. Whatever pay raises are included in the current proposal will largely be eaten up by higher out-of-pocket expenses that workers will have to pay for health care for themselves and their families. According to photos of the contract provided to the WSWS, deductibles will double, and copays will rise from 10 percent to 15 percent. The costs of office, emergency room and urgent care visits will sharply rise and the OOP (Out-of-Pocket) maximum for a family will rise from \$1,500 to \$4,000.

“We still should be out on strike to have leverage to bargain,” the veteran worker told the WSWS. “There is absolutely nothing that the Core Group (of more senior, higher-paid workers) will benefit from in this contract. They want to take our earned vacation before we can go out on FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act), if needed. Insurance is going to 85/15 with \$4,000 out of pocket. It is going to cost us \$52 a week for coverage. The prescription plan is going up also.

“With the higher premiums for insurance, higher prescription rates, higher out-of-pocket period, we will be making less money on the hour than the current contract we are under. We may get a \$3 raise in this contract but with all the add-ons to the contract we will be making less money on the hour than we are currently,” he said.

“Everyone I’ve spoken to in the Core Group, no one approves of this. The only way this contract will get voted in is to sell this thing to the people making less money on the promise of getting to \$30 an hour. They want the Core people faded out in my opinion.”

“As of now,” the worker continued, “most assembly workers are not happy with the contract either. They say the tier will be faded out in five to eight years but in five years there will be another contract up and we all know that the company and the union could do their ‘side bargaining agreement’ and keep the tier in the plant.” He added: “There is absolutely no incentive to this contract but a few extra dollars that the new hires and the workers hired after 2011 might get. The union is also dangling a \$1,400 ‘signing bonus’ in front of these workers. I tell the workers not to fall for that because once the bonus is taxed, you’ll be shocked at how little you’re getting.”

In 2015 and 2019, the UAW also told workers in the Big Three auto plants that it was “phasing out” the two-tier system the union agreed to in 2007 and 2009. In the end, however, the union created even more tiers, including for low-paid, temporary part-time workers who have few or no rights but still pay UAW dues. At the same time, the UAW collaborated with GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler (now Stellantis) to purge the factories of higher-paid “legacy workers” and replace them with workers earning inferior wages and benefits.

“The union is not for the people of the Volvo Dublin Plant,” the veteran worker continued. “We feel like Volvo thinks they are the law, and that the union are the police for Volvo and the police try to make the workers walk the straight line, so Volvo gets what they want. Numerous people will drop the union if it passes. The select ‘Union Leadership’ gets the side deals to benefit them in all this mess. Our local President and bargaining chair and the committee are sellouts. They said today, “This is a Good Contract” and everyone should be happy. Well, we just aren’t seeing it, period!!

To oppose this betrayal, workers at the New River Valley plant have formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC). The committee is fighting to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the UAW and link up the Virginia workers with Mack-Volvo truck workers in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Florida, and other sections of workers engaged in current battles, including ExxonMobil workers in Texas, Alabama coal miners, ATI steelworkers, Massachusetts nurses and grad student workers in New York City.

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