

Volvo Truck workers voice opposition to UAW sellout deal in lead-up to contract vote

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In two days, 3,000 workers at Volvo's New River Valley (NRV) heavy truck manufacturing plant in Dublin, Virginia will begin voting on a tentative agreement backed by the United Auto Workers union. What little details of the agreement have been revealed in the UAW's limited contract "highlights" show that it is yet another significant assault on workers' livelihoods.

The proposed contract has generated growing anger among Volvo Truck workers, who are determined to reverse years of eroding wages and working conditions.

Leading up to and during the two-week strike which began in mid-April, the union maintained an information blackout on the negotiations. Just as the strike was set to disrupt production Volvo's Mack Truck facilities, workers were abruptly told to return to the factory, with the UAW claiming that a deal had been reached, but refusing to release the contract's terms or hold a vote on it prior to ending the strike. The union has still not released the full details of the proposed contract, instead only releasing a 20-page "highlights" document, which nonetheless reveals deep concessions that the union has agreed to hand over to the company.

Speaking on the contract, a worker at the NRV plant told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, "The tentative agreement sure is a great deal, *for Volvo*. The new point system for absences—we know it is all about getting rid of core workers. Seven points and you are fired. Seniority won't matter if this contract passes. That's why they want it to take eight years to get top pay, because no one will be able to remain employed that long in the first place.

"How could the union agree to put 4-10 [four days per week, 10 hours per day, also known as the AWS] in

the contract? The local said that implementation of the AWS would require further approval at the local level so it could still be stopped. But AWS is already in the contract, so it made it that far! Why let it get in there in the first place? The local said it was to pacify the company. Forget that! Have some cojones and don't let it into the contract at all, period."

Another worker said, "We have to take our vacation in 10-hour increments, which means if I worked 20 years for 5 weeks the company already keeps two of them for *their* planned shutdown [held annually for retooling and maintenance] so that only leaves me three weeks. If I have to take them in 10 hour increments it means I lose one day for every week I earned, so I work 20 years for two weeks of vacation. They eliminated half-day personal days so we only get two personal days now."

In the run-up to the vote, which is scheduled to take place on May 16, the union is doing everything it can to ensure that the contract passes to avoid any possible disruption in Volvo's profit-making. To this end, the union is utilizing its well-worn tactic of "divide and conquer."

The union is holding separate "town hall meetings"—which are really just platforms for UAW bureaucrats to threaten and intimidate workers into voting "yes"—for Volvo's hourly and salaried workers. In addition, the union is holding a ratification meeting to discuss the "highlights" of the contract the same day as voting on the contract begins. Thus, a worker who attends the ratification meeting will have just two hours before contract voting ends.

Speaking on how the local uses the UAW International to cover up its own wrongdoing, a worker stated, "In this contract struggle we've seen a lot of the blame game from the union. The local says, 'We

didn't agree to this contract proposal and didn't even want to present it to you, it was all the International.' Then we ask them, why *did you* bring it back to us?

"The International has never really represented us and they've never gotten us a good deal in my 20-plus years at NRV. Apparently the International representatives told the local bargaining representatives to leave the negotiations periodically. We heard Matt [Local 2069 President Matt Blondino] and Greg [Hourly Bargaining Chair Greg Shank] have the opportunity to get into the International. I am angry that they openly said that they don't represent retirees. One NRV worker is even circulating a petition to get rid of Blondino and Shank."

Another worker stated, "There needs to be a third party overseeing the vote because all the union votes are fraudulent. All of the local leadership elections are conducted with pencils and they destroy the ballots immediately." In line with its overriding of workers democratic rights for decades, the UAW has thus far arrogantly resisted against members of the rank-and-file being allowed to oversee the tabulation of votes.

Workers' concerns that the UAW will seize on the closed-doors aspect of vote counting to employ dirty tricks to force through the contract are well-founded. Evidence pointing to ballot stuffing emerged in the aftermath of the 2015 Ford-UAW contract ratification. Attempts by a member of Local 600 in Dearborn, Michigan, to carry out an investigation, following the UAW's own procedures, were stonewalled by the union.

Similar accusations of ballot tampering and other fraudulent behavior carried out by the UAW occurred during the 2015 John Deere contract negotiations, in which the union forced through a sellout agreement for 11,000 workers despite widespread opposition.

Several workers told the WSWS that they planned to take pictures of their "no" votes and were encouraging coworkers to do the same. A fight against the UAW concessions deal is both possible and necessary, and workers should build momentum for a decisive rejection of the contract this Sunday.

However, while a "no" vote is needed, it is critical that the initiative and the control of the negotiations be taken out of the hands of the UAW.

Workers at Volvo's NRV facility have already taken the first steps by initiating their own rank-and-file

committee independent of the UAW. The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee has appealed to all workers at the NRV plant to vote "no" on the proposed contract, and in opposition to the UAW's concessions, has put forward the following demands based on what workers need:

- An immediate 25 percent across-the-board wage increase to restore income lost over the last three UAW contracts.

- The abolition of the multi-tier wage system and the restoration of the principle of "Equal pay for equal work."

- Full overtime payments for work over eight hours a day and weekend work. No forced overtime! One full-day notice before any scheduling of overtime, with the right to refuse with no retaliation.

- An end to speedup and harassment by management. We are not inmates of a prison, but self-respecting workers.

- Workers' oversight of safety protocols and social distancing to stop the spread of COVID-19. The right to halt production and close the plant for full cleaning, with guaranteed compensation to workers, if there are outbreaks.

To take up the fight for these demands and to join the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, we urge Volvo workers to contact us at autoworkers@wsws.org.



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wsws.org/contact