

# Vote “no” on the UAW-Volvo sellout agreement! Join the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee and expand the struggle throughout the truck manufacturing and auto industries!

WSWS Autoworker Newsletter

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This weekend, the United Auto Workers union is seeking to ram through its latest sellout contract at Volvo Truck’s New River Valley factory.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* urges Volvo workers to decisively reject this miserable pro-company agreement during Sunday’s ratification vote. Workers did not strike for two weeks just to see their real wages crumble, health care costs rise, the tier system continue and their workplace become even more unbearable over the next five years!

The UAW is conniving with Volvo to enforce the company’s demands any way it can, including the possibility of rigging the contract vote. For workers to prevent such an outcome, a bold initiative and a new organization are required.

Workers should join the recently formed Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee and demand oversight over Sunday’s vote and ballot count. Control of the situation must be taken out of the hands of the bribe-takers in the UAW and a counteroffensive launched among workers throughout the truck manufacturing and auto industries.

From the start of the “negotiations” with Volvo, the UAW did everything it could to keep workers in the dark on the content of its discussions with the company. This was because the basic framework of the new contract had already been dictated by the company, and the union was merely waiting for the most opportune moment to spring it on workers.

After last month’s strike reached two weeks, when it was just about to seriously impact operations at Volvo’s Mack operations, the UAW abruptly announced a tentative agreement and ordered workers to shut down pickets and return to work, while adamantly refusing to hold a vote first or reveal any details of its deal with the company.

Despite persistent demands by workers for the full contract to be released, the UAW has only handed out self-serving contract “highlights” since the strike ended, a timeworn practice which

it has used in recent decades to conceal the worst concessions from its members in the auto industry and at other manufacturers such as John Deere, Caterpillar, Navistar, Mack, Daimler and elsewhere.

But even these “highlights” make it all too apparent that the contract is entirely on the company’s terms, allowing it to contain or lower labor costs in the coming years.

The most significant concessions in the deal include:

- **De facto pay cuts:** Workers hired before 2011 would receive only a 9 percent increase over the five-year contract, which would almost inevitably mean a cut to real wages when taking into account inflation, which by many measures has already shot up to its highest level in a decade.

The UAW’s biggest claim, to have “eliminated tiered wages and benefits,” is not worth the paper it is written on. First, the timeframe for lower-tier workers to reach top pay is eight years, three years past the life of the contract itself. The UAW in fact used the same snake-oil ploy in the 2015 contracts with the Big Three auto companies, repackaging the old “second tier” with the new label “in-progression.

- **Sharply higher health care costs:** The nominal wage increases would be even more eroded by substantial increases to workers’ health care costs. Deductibles would double from \$200/\$400 (individual/family) to \$400/\$800; the coinsurance rate would likewise double from 10 to 15 percent in 2022; and workers’ portion of premium payments would increase.

Moreover, maximum out-of-pocket costs *would more than double*, rising from \$750 for single coverage and \$1,500 for families to \$2,000 for single and \$4,000 for families.

- **The Alternative Work Schedule and the attack on the eight-hour day:** Buried at the back of the highlights packet, the agreement includes language allowing for the hated “Alternative Work Schedule” (AWS), under which workers would labor for four 10-hour days each week with no overtime, effectively abolishing the principle of the eight-hour day.

Beyond these, which are only the most blatant attacks in the deal, the UAW also states that the health care plan for retirees, who cannot vote on the contract, is still “under discussion,” meaning that the company will be allowed to do what it wants.

Workers should ask themselves: If this is what the UAW wanted to “highlight,” what “lowlights” in the full contract and various “memoranda of understanding” are still being concealed?

In a union meeting held earlier this week, UAW Secretary-Treasurer Ray Curry, who oversaw the negotiations with Volvo and heads the UAW’s Heavy Truck Department, browbeat workers who raised questions over the UAW’s sweetheart deal with the company. Curry ominously declared his conviction that the contract would pass by “60 percent,” which can only mean the union is determined to have the vote come out the “right” way.

This is the conduct of an arrogant company executive, not a representative of workers.

Just days before the vote, former UAW President Dennis Williams was sentenced to just under two years in federal prison, having pleaded guilty to embezzling union funds. Around a dozen high-level UAW officials—including another former UAW president, Gary Jones—have been convicted following a years-long federal investigation into the UAW’s sprawling corruption, which revealed that union officials took bribes from auto executives in return for “company-friendly” agreements.

The UAW long ago ceased to be a “union” in any meaningful sense of that term. It has become an arm of management, run by upper-middle class gangsters, who are contemptuous of the workers they claim to represent.

A group of Volvo Truck workers, following the examples set by their brothers and sisters in the light vehicle plants, have recently formed an independent rank-and-file committee to oppose this sellout agreement. Against it, the committee has raised the following demands:

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

- The abolition of the multilayer 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, with guaranteed compensation to workers, if there are outbreaks.

The conduct of the struggle and the negotiations cannot be left in the hands of the UAW International and local UAW officials. In coordination with the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, workers should elect new strike and negotiating committees, genuinely composed of and led by workers themselves.

The struggle at Volvo is part of a growth of strikes and class struggle in the US and internationally. From coal miners in Alabama, to steelworkers in Pennsylvania, grad student workers (themselves in the UAW) in New York City, along with teachers in Brazil, electricity workers in Turkey, and tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka, workers are fighting for safe and decent working conditions and higher living standards but face the resistance of both their employers and the unions.

In order to fight a giant multinational like Volvo, workers need an international strategy and organization of their own. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International, which publishes the WSWS, have issued a call for an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees in order to unify these emerging struggles in an organization which can mobilize workers’ collective strength on the broadest possible basis around the world.

We urge workers at Volvo Truck to take up this fight and join the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee today.



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