

Volvo Truck workers in Virginia overwhelmingly defeat UAW-backed contract

Jerry White
17 May 2021

Volvo Truck workers in Dublin, Virginia on Sunday overwhelmingly defeated the proposed deal the United Auto Workers (UAW) was pushing for a new five-year labor agreement. According to UAW Local 2069, which had backed the deal, 91 percent of the workers voted against it.

Nearly 3,000 workers walked out on strike at the New River Valley truck manufacturing plant on April 17, determined to reverse the concessions the UAW has handed to the Swedish-based multinational over the last four contracts. The UAW abruptly shut down the two-week strike on April 30, announcing that it had reached a deal with “substantial gains.” The UAW ordered workers to return to their jobs without seeing, let alone voting on the deal.

As details emerged, however, opposition exploded, and workers formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee to lead the fight to defeat the sellout deal. The committee’s call for a rejection of the contract was widely circulated among workers. During a series of so-called informational meetings leading up to Sunday’s vote, UAW International Secretary Treasurer Ray Curry, who negotiated the deal, and other UAW officials responded to opposition by telling workers this was the best they were going to get. They arrogantly predicted the contract would pass by “60 percent.”

“Everybody came out to vote ‘no,’” one Volvo worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*.

“The union hall was packed. One of my buddies who’s here 15 years said he’s never seen a turnout like this. People waited in line for twenty minutes to vote. The contract was toilet paper. If the UAW tried to claim it passed, I’m not saying blood would have flowed in the streets, but there would have been a mutiny at the union hall.”

Workers were particularly angered by the miniscule

pay increases from a company that just doubled its first-quarter profits and has paid its top executives and shareholders millions. The “increases” are, in fact, cuts in real wages given the rate of inflation and sharp increases in health care costs contained in the proposed contract.

The deal would have also maintained the hated multi-tier wage system, introduced a 10-hour-a-day “Alternative Work Schedule,” and opened the way for further cuts to retiree benefits. To add insult to injury, the deal would have allowed Volvo and the UAW to reopen the contract at any time “by mutual agreement” to impose new cutbacks.

Another worker described one of the meetings before the vote. “During the Q & A, one of the national union guys said if we voted it down, we would be in for a ‘long, hard strike.’ Well, that’s what we were supposed to be doing a few weeks ago! Here you have a top UAW official, my supposed ‘union brother,’ saying this is the best you are going to get, take it or leave it.

“Among the workers there is a feeling that the entire bargaining committee should be removed, and a new committee elected. Workers want to get rid of every one of them and get all new people—period.

“The union said they were going to get a survey out to every worker by Tuesday to see what we want different in the next contract. But they’re going to come back with the same deal, just repackaged differently. For a lot of the workers, we’re saying we voted this one down, we’ll vote the next one down and vote down the third one. We can win a whole lot more with a long strike that stops their trucks from being produced.”

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls on workers to join the Volvo Workers Rank-and-

File Committee to demand that the UAW bargaining committee be withdrawn, and that a new negotiating committee, appointed by rank-and-file workers, take over.

The strike must be resumed, not under the control of the UAW executives, but under the democratic control of the rank and file.

The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee urges workers to demand:

The rank-and-file committee is independent of the pro-corporate UAW, so that workers can organize their own struggle.

- An immediate 25 percent pay increase to make up for all past concessions.

- Full health care for all workers, paid for by the company.

- The abolition of the two-tier wage system and the restoration of the principle, “equal pay for equal work.” The immediate transfer of all lower-tier workers to the highest tier.

- The implementation of a COLA escalator clause to meet soaring prices of consumer goods.

The massive resources of the UAW strike fund, built up through workers’ dues money, must be made available to provide full income for all workers throughout the duration of a strike, to make clear to the company that they will not be able to starve workers into submission.

“The \$275-a-week strike pay is hogwash,” one Volvo worker said. “I calculated it. If you have 3,000 people out for two months that’s \$6.6 million in strike pay. The UAW has a \$680 million strike fund. It’s a slap in the face, designed to starve us to death.”

All the talk by the UAW about taking a survey is aimed at keeping workers on the job for as long as possible, blocking the resumption of strike activity. Workers know what they want and are prepared to fight for it. On the other hand, the UAW knows what workers do not want, that is, all the concessions the UAW included in this rotten deal.

The company stooges in the UAW know that if

Volvo workers win substantial raises and other improvements, this would set off a wave of struggles by Mack-Volvo, other truck manufacturing workers and workers throughout the auto industry to eliminate the two-tier system and overturn decades of UAW-backed concessions.

The militant stand taken by Volvo workers is part of the growing resistance of workers in the US and internationally, including strikes and other struggles by Alabama coal miners, Texas oil workers, Massachusetts nurses and steelworkers in Pennsylvania and other states.

A common fight is needed by Volvo, Mack-Volvo and other workers throughout the truck manufacturing and auto industry in the US and internationally. To take up this fight we urge workers to join the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee and take part in the growing international network of rank-and-file committees.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact