

Volvo Truck workers in Virginia demand full contract as UAW pushes another sellout deal

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Rank-and-file Volvo workers in Dublin, Virginia, are demanding the release of the full contract after the United Auto Workers announced that its negotiators had reached another deal, this time for a six-year labor agreement covering the nearly 3,000 workers at the New River Valley plant.

The UAW Local 2069 bargaining committee released a statement Thursday afternoon saying it had “made changes” to the previous tentative agreement, which workers rejected by 91 percent on May 16. However, the statement provided only sketchy details, which angered workers more. In addition, workers say that the UAW has deliberately scheduled the ratification vote for Wednesday, June 2, right after the Memorial Day holiday, in the hopes that the turnout would be lower because many workers will be on vacation.

In a statement posted Thursday on the national union’s website, UAW Secretary-Treasurer and Director of the UAW Heavy Truck Department Ray Curry, who negotiated the last sellout deal, claimed workers “made even more solid gains toward fair pay, benefits and job security protections.” In an insult to the intelligence of Volvo workers, Region 8 Director Mitchell Smith said, “Out of respect for our members, we will refrain from discussing details publicly until the membership at Volvo Truck can be fully briefed.”

The announcement of the deal came the day after the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), which led the fight to defeat the contract, issued an open letter to the UAW. Workers “will not accept any contract that is negotiated behind closed doors,” the committee declared, “for the simple reason that this would only produce another sellout.” The letter, which was widely circulated and spread “like wildfire,” according to workers, outlined what the VWRFC said was “the minimal basis for an agreement that workers will accept,” including substantial wage and benefit improvements, the

abolition of the multitier wage system and protection of the eight-hour day.

Workers are being told they can “ask questions” about the deal during meetings that start early this morning at the UAW Local 2069 hall. The last time that happened, workers reported, Local 2069 President Matt Blondino and local officials threatened to walk away from workers challenging them, saying, “If they didn’t like the contract, they could get another job.”

“The little information on this contract shows it is just a rejuggling of the words from the old one,” a lower seniority assembly worker told the WWS. “We want to see the entire contract. If you were buying a car, you would search for the title and see if there were back taxes owed on it. You want to know what you’re buying. We need the full deal released, not just the so-called ‘highlights.’”

“When you read it and compare the language to the previous contract, you can see that it has nothing to do with the top five issues workers wrote down in the survey. Instead, they put higher pay for retirees and insurance. They need this, but this is to sweeten the pot for the old guys to get out sooner. There’s really nothing for anybody else. But this isn’t like it was 11 years ago when they got the Core Group to sell us out for better pay. Now everybody wants to be together.”

After the tentative agreement was announced, the worker said he had been on the phone all Friday morning with workers opposing the new deal. “If you are an employee of Volvo, it pretty much tells you what our local and the main union think about us. It doesn’t take rocket science to know that somebody’s getting a payoff. There are no numbers. They say there’s a decrease in premiums, but what is the decrease? There is no meaning to what they sent out. It’s like they’re saying, ‘trust us.’”

“The company and the union got an agreement, but the workers don’t want it. We want to go on strike; people

are mad. Saturday and Sunday there are going to be meetings with the union officials—I'd hate to be them. But there will not be a vote on it until after Memorial Day, almost two weeks from now. They want to keep us in there, getting trucks out. They are stocking trucks in other places. Amazon is pissed because they want their trucks. But nobody wants to be in there. Why should I work to make them money when this is what they are offering?"

Last month, the UAW abruptly shut down a two-week strike just at the point when it was creating a serious inventory shortage. UAW Executive Curry ordered the workers back into the plant without allowing them to see or vote on the agreement. As details emerged, however, opposition grew, culminating in last Sunday's vote when workers overwhelmingly rejected the agreement.

The VWRFC letter unleashed a wellspring of opposition in the plant. Some workers have begun circulating a petition, which has gotten over 1,000 signatures, to remove the local union officials and the bargaining committee. Others are exposing the tens of thousands of dollars the UAW pays local union officials for "training," in addition to their Volvo salaries.

One VWRFC member described the outpouring of pent-up feelings as an "awakening" of workers in the plant.

Facing a growing rebellion by workers, who now have a leadership in the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, the UAW is resorting to lies and bullying to try to ram through the deal. "It's clear that the open letter to the UAW sent by the rank-and-file committee is having an effect," a veteran Volvo worker said. "The UAW is denouncing the WSWS and is afraid that everybody has turned on the union after they brought this back again. Everybody is going to vote it down. They're talking to each other, and everybody is going to stick together like we did the last time.

"They are threatening us now, saying if the new tentative agreement is not voted in that we will be out on strike for three to five months because that's the best they can do. They're trying a scare tactic. We are prepared to go out. We were ready the last time. But they put us back to work."

The worker said that local President Blondino is telling the workers to vote yes because the company stepped up and changed a lot. "Nothing changed," the worker said. "They stretched it out to six years with a 12% raise. That is only 2% a year, less than the 3% in the last TA. In the new deal they reduced the out-of-pocket cost from \$4,000 to \$2,000 a year, or \$56 to \$36 a week. By the time the new contract comes up to six years, it will be \$3,000. In

other words, in the next contract, they'll start at \$3,000 and then push it to \$6,000-\$7,000. It's all about the insurance and benefits. A pay raise won't mean anything if our health care costs go up."

Another younger assembly worker said, "Due to the pandemic, a lot of the companies have driven their trucks into the ground, well past what they should have done. Volvo, Freightliner and other companies are getting lots of orders to get the economy going again. We have a lot more leverage than we think."

On Thursday, the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee distributed a new statement, which began:

Taken aback by the failure of the UAW to push through its contract over our opposition, Volvo is scrambling. A Volvo executive and an Amazon executive flew into Virginia to give marching orders to the plant managers and the UAW to ram through a contract as quickly as possible. Volvo has an agreement to sell trucks to Amazon, and they don't want us workers to get in the way.

In response, the UAW has now announced a "new" tentative agreement that it is going to try to ram through with lies and threats. We distributed an Open Letter to UAW officials yesterday, but the UAW officials haven't gotten the message. The "new" agreement is a slightly reworded version of the "old" one that we rejected by 91 percent.

The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee is being built as the genuine voice of Volvo workers in the plant. In opposition to the UAW and its efforts to divide workers, the committee is fighting to unify all workers and link up their struggles with workers at the Mack-Volvo plants in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Florida and workers throughout the truck and auto industry.

The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee is urging workers to join and build the committee by contacting it by email at volvowrfc@gmail.com or by text at (540) 307-0509.



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