

Rank-and-file Volvo workers demand release of full contract as terms of UAW's secret deal leak out

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Opposition among Volvo Truck workers in Dublin, Virginia, is growing as workers demand the release of the full details of the tentative agreement the United Auto Workers has reached with the multinational truck manufacturers. Last week, the UAW Local 2069 bargaining committee released a one-page summary of supposed changes it had negotiated to its April 30 agreement, which workers resoundingly defeated by 91 percent.

On Monday, UAW Local 2069 announced that the ratification vote will be held on Sunday, June 6, at the union hall. The date was changed from June 2, after workers denounced the UAW for holding the vote right after the Memorial Day holiday, in a transparent effort to lower the turnout because many workers would still be on vacation.

On Saturday, the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which led the fight to defeat the first tentative agreement on May 16, issued a new statement, titled "Show us the contract." The VWRFC demanded "the immediate release of the entire 'new' Tentative Agreement that the UAW says it has reached with Volvo. No one in their right mind would buy a used car sight unseen. We are not going to buy this contract without knowing what's in it!"

It continued: "This act has been played before. The UAW officials 'negotiate' an agreement behind our backs, paint it up in rosy colors, tell us it is the best we can get, threaten us if we don't support it, try to pit us against each other, and do everything they can to ram it through before we know what is happening. Well, we say: Enough of your 'highlights' and your 'roll-out meetings.'... We want the full contract, including all 'memoranda of understanding' and side agreements, so that we can study and discuss it ourselves."

The VWRFC rejected the UAW's specious claim that it was not releasing details "out of respect for our members." It replied: "But the company knows what is in the deal. The UAW knows what is in the deal. The only people who don't know are us, 'our members,' those who will actually be affected by it. With all due 'respect,' show us the contract!"

Denouncing the new TA, as "rewording of the old one," the VWRFC made it clear workers would not accept any deal unless it included among other things a 25 percent across-the-board wage increase, COLA protection, the maintenance of current health care benefits, an end to the multitier wage system and transfer all workers to top-tier pay and benefits, and the maintenance of the eight-hour day.

In what appears to be the most sinister addition to the new TA, all references to workers having the right to strike after the expiration of the proposed contract at 11:59 p.m. on April 29, 2027 have been deleted. In fact, the agreement includes a clause, which can only be interpreted as an agreement between the UAW and Volvo, to extend the current or a modified version of the current agreement, indefinitely, with workers having no input or the right to strike.

"This Agreement shall continue in effect for successive yearly periods after April 30, 2027, unless notice is given in writing by either Party not less than sixty (60) days prior to April 30, 2027 or any one (1) year anniversary date, thereafter, of its desire to modify, amend or terminate the Agreement. If such notice is given by either Party, the Parties shall thereupon meet for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of the new Agreement."

Over the weekend, workers on a private Facebook page not controlled by the UAW bureaucracy posted 32 pages of a document, titled "UAW New River Valley Tentative Agreement." Written on the cover sheet is: "The following tentative agreements are the only changes to the April 30, 2021 agreement. Unless the changed language is included in this packet, then it remains the same as previously agreed upon."

An initial examination of the documents shows, as one worker with more than two decades at the plant said, "The Contract is just a repeat from previous one. My vote is No." She added, "I am hearing Union people are telling our brothers and sisters, if we strike, we will be out a long time."

That's what we need, a long strike to show the company we won't settle for just anything. We deserve better than they are offering. How could they offer such garbage!"

The UAW claims that it has addressed workers' demands to eliminate the multitier wage and benefit system, which discriminates against so-called "competitive workers" hired in or after 2011. In fact, the new deal maintains the multitier system forcing a newly hired assembler, who comes in at \$18.77, to labor six years before reaching top pay at \$27.47. This is still more than \$3 below what an assembler in the Core Group, hired in or before 2010, makes.

Pay increases will average around 2 percent a year, less than the 3 percent included in the first TA. In any case, these meager raises will be eaten up by rising inflation—currently at an annual rate of 4.2 percent—plus the increased copays and other out-of-pocket expenses for health care that the new contract will impose on workers and their families.

The UAW boasted last week that maximum out-of-pocket expenses "was reduced," but the new TA still includes a jump from the current \$750 for individuals and \$1,500 for families to \$1,500 and \$3,000 respectively by January 1, 2026.

While giving a token increase to current and future retirees, at the same time the company and UAW are examining ways to make future cuts to retiree benefits with the new TA saying, "The Company and the Union agree to continue meeting to discuss potential prospective changes to the Volvo Plan as it applies to each group."

All "competitive workers," i.e., those hired after 2011, are excluded from the company-paid Volvo Plan retirement system and rely on inferior worker contribution 401(K) plans.

Although the UAW says workers will now be able to vote on its implementation, the new TA includes the introduction of the 10-hour-a-day Alternative Work Schedule and the de facto elimination of the eight-hour day. The notorious AWS was introduced into the auto industry in 2007 by the corrupt bribetaking UAW Vice President General Holiefield, who negotiated the 2008 and 2011 UAW-Volvo contracts. The 10-hour, four day a week schedule has allowed the auto companies to sharply reduce overtime payments, reduce break times and run the factories around the clock to maximize output.

According to the TA, "In order to better align the business, the Company may implement a four (4) ten (10) hour day work schedule via a vote (simple majority) of the affected membership (i.e. the area of the plant where the new schedule will be implemented)." Daily overtime will now be paid after 10 hours instead of eight with "first and second off duty days paid at time and one half and third off-duty paid at double time."

In some Stellantis plants, where the UAW also claimed workers had the right to vote on AWS schemes, skilled trades workers are now working seven 12-hour days.

The company will also have the power to use a punitive attendance policy to fire veteran workers, whose bodies have been worn down by decades of labor, and replace them with low wage workers.

It is clear the Volvo Group top executives who flew in last week have given their marching orders to plant management and the UAW: "Get this contract rammed through and no more strikes to delay our truck shipments to Amazon and other corporate giants."

But while Volvo and the UAW have agreed to this slave's charter, they have one problem: The overwhelming majority of workers will not buy it and now have a leadership in the VWRFC to organize their opposition.

Volvo workers who spoke to the WSWS have denounced the new TA and called for the release of the full contract. "We have to have the full contract because it is morally wrong to hide things from people that is going to affect their lives and their families' lives, even if the government and/or a union kangaroo court say so," said one worker.

Referring to the TA, another lower seniority worker said, "It's really just a worse version of the last one. They can still cancel the agreement any time they want. No sign-on bonus. They SAY top pay for everyone in six years on that letter they passed out, but it's not true, they just moved numbers around is all. They lowered insurance premium increases from 1500/4000, to 1000/3000 but with less coverage. People are livid and saying vote 'no' from ALL seniority levels. There's literally no logical reason they should be trying to give us a de facto pay cut since they've published record profits the last several years."

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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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact