

Volvo Truck workers in Virginia campaign to defeat UAW's second sellout deal

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Volvo workers: Contact the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee by email at volvowrfc@gmail.com or by text at (540) 307-0509.

United Auto Workers Local 2069 officials are holding a series of “townhall meetings” this week to counter opposition from rank-and-file workers to the UAW’s six-year contract proposal with Volvo Trucks North America. Nearly 3,000 workers at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia, Volvo’s largest truck manufacturing facility in the world, will be voting on the pact this Sunday, June 6.

There is widespread opposition to the deal, which is little more than a rehash of the first UAW-backed contract that workers rejected by 91 percent on May 16. The recently formed Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), which led the opposition to the first sellout deal, is actively campaigning for defeat of the new proposal.

In a statement opposing the deal, the VWRFC denounces the UAW for accepting a deal that imposes a new 10-hour work schedule, retains the multi-tier wage system, and includes meager pay raises that will be eaten up by higher out-of-pocket health care expenses and rising consumer prices. The VWRFC is demanding a 25 percent across-the-board wage increase, a cost-of-living adjustment, the transfer of all workers to top-tier pay and benefits, and the maintenance of current health insurance rates and coverage. It is also calling for the defense of the eight-hour day and fully paid pensions and health benefits for retirees.

Overseeing the UAW’s campaign to ram through the deal is UAW Secretary Treasurer and Heavy Truck Department Director Ray Curry, a career union executive in line to take over the UAW presidency after Rory Gamble retires. Curry shut down the two-week strike of Volvo workers on April 30 without workers

seeing the previous deal or being able to vote on it. He has again rejected workers’ demands to see the full contract before the vote and has dispatched international, regional and local union officials in a last-ditch effort to push the contract through with a combination of lies, intimidation and fraud.

“Right now, they are telling us if we reject it, we will be on a long strike, possibly six months,” a Volvo worker and a member of the VWRFC told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “The UAW always threatens us whenever we vote no on one of their rotten contracts. It’s not the company that does it, they leave it to the UAW thugs to threaten that the company will up and move to Mexico unless we accept the contract.

“Freightliner pulled the same thing in South Carolina. They pushed more production to Mexico, but they already had a plant there. The New River Valley plant is Volvo’s only plant in North America, and they just invested \$400 million to expand it. It would be a big deal to build a new plant in Mexico and would cause huge delays to deliver trucks. I’m not saying they wouldn’t walk away from \$400 million to get cheaper labor, but it would be more difficult.

“[For] the last three contracts, the company and the union said Volvo was hurting, and if you sacrifice now, you’ll get it back when times are better. Now the company is making plenty of money. We helped the company out three times and we want what we deserve. These money-grubbing bastards at the top have to spread the wealth.”

The statement from the VWRFC calling for a “no” vote was being widely circulated, the worker said, and was creating even greater opposition to the corrupt UAW. Referring to the series of union executives who have pleaded guilty to criminal charges related to the years-long federal investigation, he asked rhetorically,

“How many top UAW officials have been thrown in jail for embezzling and laundering money?”

Some were scared by the UAW’s threats, he added, but workers were going to vote the contract down Sunday and if a long strike was needed, so be it.

The six-year expansion and upgrade of the New River Valley plant, which was subsidized with \$16.5 million in grants and other incentives from Democratic Governor Ralph Northam, will allow the Swedish-based multinational to produce the Volvo VNR Electric truck, as well as a newly designed truck that uses a “universal cab,” that is, a cab used for both Volvo and Mack trucks. Volvo, which bought Mack in 2000, has already been using the same frames on both brands for years.

While the new cabs would presumably be shipped to the Mack-Volvo plant in Allentown, Pennsylvania, for final assembly, another member of the VWRFC warned that Volvo could eventually shift production of all its vehicles to the expanded New River Valley plant, which is supposed to add 777 jobs by 2025. “The new stamping plant here is going to be for Volvo and Volvo-Mack trucks. We’re cheaper labor down here, and if they got this contract passed, it would be used to get rid of the Mack plants in Maryland, Pennsylvania and other states. That’s why they’re trying to shove this contract down our throats. They want even cheaper labor.”

Responding to the appeal by the VWRFC for a joint struggle with the Mack-Volvo workers, a worker at the powertrain plant in Hagerstown, Maryland, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I’m behind those workers [at NRV] 100 percent,” adding that he had not voted for a UAW-backed contract since he began working at the facility several contracts previously. “Usually what happens is that they give us highlights that look pretty good, we find out later, during the course of the contracts what has been taken away from us.”

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

“I’m for unity and for a strike” of all Volvo and Mack workers, he said, adding that he reached out to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* after workers at his plant printed copies of its articles and left them for others to read. “You guys are being seen,” he said, adding that there are “lots of people on board” for the

building of a rank-and-file committee at his facility.

In another move shrouded in business secrecy in 2019, Volvo leased a new 280,900-square-foot manufacturing facility for an unspecified “business start-up” 45 miles from Dublin in the Roanoke suburb of Salem, Virginia. The facility, which also received state funding, employs 250 non-union workers from Volvo’s Mack Truck division and builds medium-duty trucks to compete with Freightliner for business from Amazon and other companies.

One of the major issues the UAW is likely negotiating with Volvo about is whether it will be allowed to extend its franchise into the Salem plant. In return for collecting dues money, the UAW would no doubt have promised to keep labor costs at or near the level of non-union workers.

In the auto industry, the UAW has signaled its willingness to impose a sharp reduction in wages in exchange for “unionizing” workers at the new start-ups and joint ventures General Motors and Ford are planning with electric vehicle component manufacturers. In 2009, the UAW agreed to \$15 to \$17 an hour wages at a GM plant assembling batteries in Brownstown Township, Michigan. In a statement this week, GM said it would support efforts by the UAW to unionize workers at two electric vehicle battery factories it is building in Ohio and Tennessee with South Korean battery maker LG Energy Solution. In a statement, GM praised the UAW for its “historic and constructive relationship” with the auto industry and said the UAW “would be well positioned to represent the workforce.”

“There is no union in the Salem plant,” a member of the VWRFC told the *WSWS*. “They don’t need the UAW. We have to get those workers to join us and build a rank-and-file committee, so all Volvo and Mack workers can be united.”

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