

A call to all workers to support the New River Valley Volvo workers' struggle!

Baltimore Amazon Workers Rank-and-File Safety Committee
4 June 2021

The Baltimore Amazon Workers Rank-and-File Committee denounces Amazon's effort to put pressure on New River Valley (NRV) Volvo manufacturing workers to accept the sell-out contract being concocted by Volvo management with the servile assistance of the United Auto Workers union (UAW).

Nearly 3,000 Volvo workers in Dublin, Virginia, are currently in a fight to reject for a second time a concession-filled contract offer being shoved at them by Volvo and the UAW. In late April, the workers had their strike abruptly called off in the UAW's first effort to force them to accept the company's offer. Last month, workers voted "no" by 91 percent against this sellout and, critically, formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC) to take up a struggle for rank-and-file auto workers independently of the corrupt and pro-business UAW.

According to news reports, Amazon executives recently visited the Volvo Group's NRV facility to place pressure on the automaker and the UAW to end the contract dispute and bring the workers to heel immediately. Amazon has contracts with NRV to construct its fleet of delivery vans throughout North America. In addition, Volvo is constructing a facility in the nearby city of Salem, Virginia, which will be involved in the construction of more vehicles.

If Amazon has involved itself in the contract negotiation, Amazonians around the world will recognize its strong-arm tactics. Amazon is using its corporate weight to get Volvo workers "back on task" the same as it does with its own employees.

In addition, aspects of the NRV contract, such as the \$17 hire-in rate for new employees and the introduction of a 4x10 shift schedule (four days of 10-hour shifts to cut down on overtime usage), mirror the working conditions that we Amazonians now face. For months,

we workers at the BWI2 Fulfillment Center in Baltimore have been placed on a Mandatory Extended Time (MET) shift, while others have been forced to work 10.5-hour "megacycle" shifts.

Throughout the pandemic, Amazon has reported tens of thousands of COVID-19 infections at its warehouses. In Ontario, Canada, this resulted in the forced shutdown of an entire warehouse. Amazon's total amount of COVID-19 cases is undoubtedly far higher, as Amazon does not tell us, its workers, the number of infections it has. Its last reporting of total cases in the United States was in October of last year.

We Amazonians gamble with our lives every day at the company's numerous facilities. This is no different than what auto workers face at their factories. Reports from the New River Valley plant estimate as many as a third of all its employees have become infected with COVID-19.

If working conditions at Amazon and Volvo appear similar, it is not because of Amazon's so-called "generosity," but due to the treachery of the UAW, which has allowed its unionized members' pay to drop to the level of entry-level non-unionized workers. According to company statements, the last three contracts at the NRV plant have allowed the company to shed nearly 25 percent of its present labor costs. Its current offer to begin new hires at \$17 an hour is identical to the starting wages at Amazon.

The UAW, in aiding the corporate campaign to sell the latest contract offer to its members, is in a de facto alliance with Amazon and Volvo against workers. We call upon Amazon workers throughout the region to actively support these workers, to read the statements published by the VWRFC and to become familiar with this struggle. It is your struggle, too.

We also appeal to Volvo-Mack truck workers in

Maryland, Pennsylvania and elsewhere to reach out to the *World Socialist Web Site* and fight to break the wall of silence imposed on you by the UAW between your brothers and sisters at NRV. We also appeal to striking mine workers at Warrior Met coal in Alabama. Their strike is being railroaded to defeat by the United Mine Workers of America union (UMWA), which, like the UAW at Volvo, is forcing workers to remain isolated in their struggle.

Instead of fighting the coal bosses, the UMWA has taken to physically attacking supporters of the striking miners. Such behavior must be forcefully denounced and opposed by the entire working class!

Fundamentally, workers must form their own independent rank-and-file committees to expand the struggle in the interests of workers. The VWRFC has demanded:

- A 25 percent pay increase across the board
- A cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to stay ahead of inflation
- A transfer of all workers immediately to top-tier pay in the company (currently at \$30)
- The maintenance of current health insurance benefits and coverage

If corporate giants like Amazon are allowed to intervene in this struggle to push workers' living standards down, then it is workers' duty to intervene in their own interests to raise them.

Just as Virginia's Democratic state government has awarded millions of dollars in grant money for the Volvo Group to expand its operations at NRV, it has done the same for Amazon. In addition to the money given to Amazon to set up its major fulfillment center warehouses throughout the state, the government has also footed the bill for the construction of the company's "HQ2," located in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C.

The corporation is implicated in the death of Amazonian Poushawn Brown, who worked at Amazon's DDC3 Industrial Drive location in Springfield, Virginia. Brown, who worked in the company's COVID-19 testing department, died mysteriously in her sleep after arriving home from a shift at her facility. The Baltimore Amazon Workers Rank-and-File Committee has issued a statement demanding that Amazon make public all information it possesses about Poushawn's last days at DDC3 to

assist in determining her cause of death.

Our present call for an alliance between rank-and-file Amazon and Volvo workers is in keeping with our statement issued last month on behalf of our committee declaring our solidarity with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). In that statement, we endorsed the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI's) call to "unify workers in a common worldwide struggle, opposing every effort by capitalist governments and the reactionary proponents of the innumerable forms of national, ethnic and racial chauvinism and identity politics to split up the working class into warring factions."

On the contrary, the present struggle, like the global pandemic, has demonstrated that workers have to unite collectively to defend themselves against the capitalist system, as it acknowledges no barriers in its pursuit to exploit us. As our statement declares, "Workers need a collective voice to speak through. Without it, we have nothing." We encourage all workers to join this fight to defend our collective interests.



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