

Detroit auto parts workers inspired by Volvo strike, shocked to learn UAW starves workers on \$275 a week in strike pay

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When a *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team visited a Dana Incorporated auto parts plant in the Detroit suburbs in the heat of Tuesday afternoon, a group of workers were on break outside, sweating and catching their breath mid-shift.

WSWS reporters told workers about the powerful strike of 3,200 autoworkers that broke out Monday at Volvo's New River Valley Plant in Dublin, Virginia, at which point the group of 10 to 15 workers gathered around to listen carefully.

The WSWS informed them that the Virginia strikers voted down two UAW sellout contracts by 90 percent and that the UAW had forced workers back to work without even seeing the contents of the second tentative agreement. The Dana workers had not heard of the strike on the news nor through the UAW, which "represents" parts workers at the Dana plant.

When WSWS reporters asked the workers what they thought, it became clear that nobody had ever asked them for their opinion before. Management and the UAW are used to barking orders and demanding the workers obey at parts plants like this one, where wages are low and the rate of exploitation is high.

As it turns out, the workers had a lot to say. News of the Virginia strike was like a match to a fuse, and it prompted them to denounce deplorable conditions at their own plant. The response shows both the powerful impact this strike can have on the working class as a whole, as well as why the UAW and corporate media are so eager to keep workers from learning about it.

"This place is a slave ship!" one younger worker shouted in anger. "We are tired. We are sweating bullets in there!"

An older worker nodded his head in agreement.

"There is no ventilation in there! It is 109 degrees on the shop floor," he said. The group of workers emphatically stated their agreement. "Right, that's a major problem," another worker declared. "It's hot as hell," said another.

When WSWS reporters asked what the UAW was doing about it, the workers exclaimed, "Nothing," "it's BS!"

WSWS reporters told the parts workers that the striking Virginia workers are forced to survive on just \$275 in weekly strike pay, while hundreds of UAW executives at the falsely named Solidarity House who make over \$100,000 per year continue to draw full pay.

"\$275 for a strike?" one worker asked in amazement. The workers rolled their eyes or shook their heads. Another worker said the strikers should get "at least" \$1,000 in strike pay from the UAW fund.

Workers were equally dismayed to learn that the UAW was not covering strikers' dental, optical, hearing, and disability coverage. The UAW continues to pay hundreds of dollars an hour to lawyers defending UAW officials under federal prosecution for accepting corporate bribes in exchange for selling out workers.

Shawn, who as a temp worker gets no UAW representation at the plant, said of the health care cutoff, "That's bull. They have good reason to be mad. If they aren't fired, they shouldn't have their health care cut and they shouldn't have to pay it."

Workers wanted to send messages of support to the Virginia strikers.

Sam, a worker with seven years at the plant, said, "I support the Volvo workers going out on strike, we are in the same boat."

Other workers who wished to remain anonymous

said, “Stay strong, keep talking to each other, keep paying attention and stay strong,” “Good luck!” “You need to stand together, and we stand with you.”

When asked if they had advice for the striking Volvo workers, the Dana parts workers warned them not to trust the UAW. “We think they’re crooks, you’re damn right,” one worker said, adding, “Those people are making \$90,000, \$100,000 a year for forty hours.” When told that the workers had set up a rank-and-file committee to direct matters themselves, one worker said, “damn, I like how that sounds.”

During the discussion, a representative from the UAW approached the WSWS reporters as they continued to talk with the group of workers. The official tried to tell workers the WSWS was a foreign news source “orchestrated in Brazil” and that “all the socialists like to do is talk.”

The WSWS reporters responded by saying workers do not want to hear any red-baiting. As for the claim about “talking,” WSWS reporters said the UAW executives have been doing plenty of talking in federal court as they are being sent to jail for selling out workers and accepting bribes from management. The workers responded by laughing and shouting, “That sounds about right,” “true!” The UAW official was forced to retreat from the discussion.

WSWS reporters also campaigned at Stellantis’ Sterling Heights Assembly Plant, and workers there sent statements of support to Volvo strikers. “We’ve got their backs,” said Mike, a sentiment echoed by others at the plant.

In the face of a blackout by the media and the AFL-CIO, the *World Socialist Web Site* is fighting to turn the attention of broader sections of workers to this critical turning point in the class struggle. Tuesday’s campaign among Detroit parts workers is one small but powerful example of how autoworkers and workers in all industries are eager to come to the defense of Virginia Volvo workers in a common fight against the auto corporations and the capitalist system.



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