

# Indian Maruti Suzuki, Toyota, Renault-Nissan workers support Volvo strike

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Workers at plants across India applauded the decision Sunday by 3,000 US Volvo Truck workers at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia to oppose a second sell-out contract negotiated by the pro-corporate United Auto Workers (UAW) and return to the picket lines on Monday.

The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) spoke to auto workers including at Maruti-Suzuki, Toyota India, and Renault-Nissan on the international significance of the Volvo strike. Indian workers spoke enthusiastically on their class solidarity with the Volvo workers' decision to strike and oppose the unions' attempt to impose a sell-out.

Leaders of the Provisional Working Committee formed in 2012, when leaders of the independent Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSWU) were framed and sent to jail for life, issued a statement. They declared, "We extend our solidarity and support to the Volvo workers, striking for their just demands at Volvo Truck New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia, USA."

Addressing the importance of the Volvo Truck workers' strike, they said: "Amid constant attacks of the capitalist class on the working class at the global level, the militant struggle of Volvo workers is an important event. We are with them in their struggle for substantial pay improvements and against higher healthcare costs, a 10-hour workday and reductions in retiree benefits."

Their statement summed up the brutal conditions facing the Maruti Suzuki Manesar plant workers amid the joint conspiracies of the company, police and the government, the Provisional Committee members thanked the Volvo workers for their courageous action.

They said, "We, the Maruti Suzuki workers, have gone through the same path of struggle in the last

decade with multiple strikes, demonstrations and campaigns. In the backlash against our struggle by the capitalist class and the Indian state, 13 of our comrades were made political prisoners of the class struggle and sentenced to life imprisonment. They have been in jail for nine years now. The struggle of the Volvo workers in Virginia, USA strengthens our struggles. We stand with them to strengthen their voices."

They concluded with the final sentence of Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto*: "Workers of the world, unite!"

The WSWS also spoke to workers at several Indian auto plants that have seen strikes demanding safety measures and shelter-at-home orders amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Renault-Nissan workers spoke in support of the Volvo Truck workers, saying their demands are legitimate and that it is important to oppose the corrupt UAW bureaucracy.

One said the UAW bureaucracy's role in the United States reminded him of the role played by union bureaucracies in India, telling the WSWS: "Initially they pretended to fight for us. But now when we question something, they don't even answer and neglect us. For the past three years, we did not have any incentive or wage increase. Before, I used to think that only management and the government are against us, but now I realize our union joined them long ago."

Several Toyota Kirloskar Motors (TKM) workers, including Prasanna and Satish, also extended their solidarity to Volvo workers in America.

Prasanna said, "When we struck work for three months against back-breaking speed-up on the assembly line, management tried to use the low-paid contract workers and management staff to run production. Although this violates labour laws, the company, with the support of the state government,

employed unskilled contract workers to break the strike.”

Satish said, “With the majority of workers on strike, production will be completely halted. That gives the workers more power to fight and win their demands. Under the impact of COVID-19, the companies demand workers work more extra hours. Working on the assembly line means tremendous pressure on workers. Every minute and even every second is counted. Such brutal working conditions workers are facing in several auto assembly plants including Toyota Kirloskar and Maruti Suzuki India.”

Pointing to slave labour conditions inside the factory, the Toyota worker added: “Under instructions from management, shop floor supervisors refused to allow workers to go to the bathroom or drink water. To justify this inhuman act, management said, ‘They can go once every two hours for 10 minutes, and they should go only during that time.’ Group leaders were told by the management to watch out for those who go out of turn and that their salary should be cut.”

Summarizing the brutal conditions at TKM, Satish said, “There are three main problems: speed-up, denial of permission for restroom breaks, and salary cuts.” He agreed that these are international problems against which workers have to be mobilised independently of the union bureaucracies, and on an international scale.

The WSWs also spoke to S. Jothi, a miner at Neyveli Lignite Corporation (NLC), an Indian central government-owned lignite (soft coal) mining and power-generation corporation, who expressed his solidarity with striking US Volvo workers.

He said, “I definitely support the demand of Volvo workers, their just demands should be supported by all workers. Workers all over the world confront more or less the same problems.

“Here at NLC, I worked as a contract worker for 20 years. Actually, thousands of contract workers making up almost half of the NLC workforce have remained in the same status for two or three decades, deprived of benefits that permanent workers are entitled to, and also paid a tiny fraction of the wages paid to permanent workers.” On average, an NLC contract worker is paid 18,000 rupees (US\$246) monthly, whereas a permanent worker earns over 100,000 rupees ( US\$1370) per month.

The contract workers, making up half the total NLC

workforce, are demanding multi-year contracts and better treatment, he explained: “The corporation granted holidays for permanent workers every other day during the pandemic, but denied the same to contract workers. Nearly hundreds of NLC workers died due to COVID-19 impact, but their next of kin were not given any compensation for the loss of lives. NLC is a highly profit-making company and its managers are paid mind boggling salaries.”

Jothi spoke in favour of the formation of the Volvo rank-and-file committee: “Here, too, the trade unions are not working in the interests of workers. They are definitely not for workers.”

Somak Banerjee, a Kalyani University student in Kolkata said “I support this strike of Volvo workers. In spite of the disastrous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, industrial sectors are reopened fully and workers ordered to work more hours for the companies to make huge profits. And the companies, with government support, are snatching their rights as well.”

Banerjee said he hoped that the example of the action at Volvo would encourage a broader struggle by workers in India and around the globe: “Millions of workers worldwide lost their jobs and lives during this pandemic but companies and governments at large refused to provide any compensation for them. ... So I like to give my solidarity to these workers who are fighting for their rights.”



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