

Mexican GM worker and autoworkers and educators in Michigan express solidarity with striking Volvo Trucks workers

Our reporters
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The courageous stand taken by Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia, who went on strike Monday after decisively voting down a second sellout agreement pushed by the United Auto Workers (UAW), has inspired workers throughout the US and internationally.

In recent days, the WSWs has published statements of support for the nearly 3,000 striking workers at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia, that have been sent by auto and auto parts workers, educators and Amazon workers in the US, and autoworkers in India who have carried out wildcat strikes against Ford, Hyundai, Maruti-Suzuki and other corporations that have kept their factories open while the deadly pandemic spreads through their plants. German workers have also sent statements of solidarity.

Striking workers in Virginia, including those who formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee to lead the opposition against the sellout contracts, have said the outpouring of support for their struggle from around the world has lifted their morale and bolstered their determination to fight both the company and the UAW.

On Tuesday, the *World Socialist Web Site* received a statement of solidarity from a General Motors worker at the company's Silao, Mexico, factory. The Silao workers have built a rank-and-file movement against the pro-company Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM).

Raziel, a worker at the Silao plant, said, "Courage, fellow Volvo workers, from the trenches of GM Silao, Mexico. I send my regards and best wishes. We can only change those parasitic unions if we stand together. We share the same conditions at Silao in our struggle against the CTM. The government supports the charro [corrupt] unions, so we are on a losing path; they don't even want [fair] elections. We send to you all of our support to get rid of those parasitic unions!"

In the weeks leading up to the 2019 GM strike in the US, the Silao workers resisted efforts by GM to increase production at the Silao complex, where 6,000 workers manufacture the company's most profitable vehicles, the Silverado and Sierra pickup trucks, for \$2.25 an hour. For their courageous act of solidarity, GM and the gangster-ridden Confederation of Mexican Workers union tracked down the leaders of the rebellion and fired the workers, including several who had more than 20 years of seniority at GM. The victimized workers issued an open letter to US workers who supported the Silao workers as they fought to get their jobs back.

Support for the Volvo workers has also come from Detroit autoworkers, including workers at Stellantis (formerly Fiat Chrysler). Former Vice President General Holiefield who was caught taking bribes from Fiat Chrysler was responsible for the signing contracts at Fiat Chrysler and Volvo Trucks that introduced the hated two-tier wage system.

Angie, a worker at the Stellantis Jefferson North Assembly Plant (JNAP) said, "I sympathize with the Volvo workers. They are united and taking a stand against the UAW. There is power in numbers: 90 percent is awesome. The UAW is speaking very loud and clear that they don't care about you. The contract they tried to sell you was a slap in the face. How do you justify that?" She said, "Workers in all the different auto plants should stand in solidarity with them."

Angie described the experiences of workers at JNAP and other Fiat Chrysler plants in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Canada who carried out job actions in defiance of the UAW in order to force a two-month shutdown of production in March 2020 because of the spread of the deadly virus.

The UAW engineered a return to work under still unsafe

conditions. “They tried to make it look good, it wasn’t clean, as soon we got back to work, it was business as usual. It went from where if one person got COVID, the whole team was quarantined to only one or two people, or no people. The UAW wasn’t in support of the workers. You don’t get paid if you come in contact with someone who has COVID.”

She said that Stellantis workers were building rank-and-file committees in their plants too.

“My suggestion,” she said, “is to work with the rank-and-file committee. It is more obvious than ever that the UAW is not for workers. They have completely sold the workers out and that will not change going forward. What has to change is the actions of the workers themselves, just like the Volvo workers.”

Angie concluded, “The fight has to be international to be truly effective. It is not just local to us. It has to be international. We all want solidarity and fairness. We all want living wages where we can be comfortable; to be able to not struggle.”

Educators who have been engaged in a struggle against federal and state authorities and the unions over the reopening of schools during the pandemic have also expressed their support for the Volvo workers.

The WSWs spoke to a teacher from northern Michigan. “I think it is fantastic that they voted it down and the people are standing up,” the teacher said. “There was also a contract up at a parts plant [Nexteer] near me, here in Michigan, just recently. I know the workers there are questioning the ballot tally, and it was reported as very close. They are questioning whether it was counted fairly by the UAW. But the vote at Volvo was overwhelming against.

“So, the UAW called them back out. They are probably going to do the same thing they did at American Axle when they only paid \$200 a week in strike benefits during that strike in 2008. Then the company cut off health insurance. I remember my husband was really livid back then when they cut off the insurance and the union did not step in to help. Single parents were in an impossible situation. They could not afford to pay to go out and get the health insurance. At that time, you could not go on an exchange and just buy it either.’

The UAW eventually sold out the three-month American Axle strike, leading to deep wage cuts and the elimination of half the jobs at its Michigan and New York plants.

‘With the strike at Volvo, buying power is not what it was before now. So, there are going to be even more

economic worries for that reason. What they pay out at the UAW for strike benefits does not even amount to minimum wage, not even close.’

She then described the struggle of educators to protect their health and lives and those of their students and communities against the bipartisan rush to reopen the schools. Referring to the hypocrisy of the teacher unions, she said, “We saw how things actually go when they told us the same type of thing when we were fighting over COVID issues at the beginning of the school year. I would hear the Michigan Education Association (MEA) say the laws and other things prevented us from doing anything about it. It was all about knocking on doors and getting Biden elected.

“But they have truly got a case of cognitive dissonance. They claimed Trump was the problem and it was important to support Biden because he was the lesser evil. But ever since Biden took office there has been a coordinated effort to get teachers back and schools open fully. [Michigan Governor] Whitmer claimed she was following the science but as soon as Biden got in office all that ‘following the science’ stuff was thrown out the window.

“So, I am very happy to see people fighting back against this situation. When we teachers wanted to strike statewide in 2011, the MEA told us we had to get 90 percent of the teachers in the state to vote for such a strike or it was a no-go. They made up that number as needed because of the anti-strike legislation.

“What they really were telling us was what an impossible thing it would be to get that percentage. So, I am glad to see such a turnout there in Virginia. Ninety percent against what the UAW brought back? That shows some real solidarity,” she said.



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