

UAW to striking Volvo workers: Your poverty strike pay will not be available for at least two weeks

Marcus Day
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On Wednesday, United Auto Workers Local 2069's announcement that nearly 3,000 striking Volvo Trucks workers would have to wait at least another week and a half to begin receiving their strike pay provoked angry and incredulous responses from workers.

The local wrote on its Facebook page that "checks SHOULD be available 6/21/2021." Replying to the deliberately non-committal language, one worker wrote with obvious irritation, "You spelled 'will be' wrong."

Others demanded to know why they had to wait two weeks at all to begin receiving their checks, since they had already struck for two weeks in April.

"Why so long? We are already signed up," one wrote.

"Not a new strike. Checks should be available the 14th," commented another.

One worker pointed out that workers had not, in fact, agreed to end the first strike in April: "We waited two weeks last time [but] we never ended the strike. You just made us go back to work. Why do we have to wait again?"

Volvo workers' first walkout this spring was unilaterally shut down by the UAW without a vote and without even releasing the first tentative agreement. As details of the deal, which included significant concessions to health care, wages, and working conditions, were exposed by the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), opposition grew. Both that deal and a second, repackaged version were overwhelmingly rejected by workers, voting them down by 90 percent.

Local 2069 ignored most of the questions from its members. Responding to only one, it was unable to justify the delay, stating only, "Generally 15 days from the start of strike." In other words, because we say so.

The paychecks the UAW is holding out on striking workers are themselves outrageously inadequate, at just

\$275 a week. This amounts to less than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, and lower than the poverty guideline for a household of two.

Any critically thinking person should ask: Why is it so low? And who makes that decision?

The UAW is, to put it mildly, not hard pressed for money. On the contrary, it sits on considerable resources, both those accumulated from workers' dues payments and from the UAW's other financial ventures.

In 2020, according to the union's LM-2 tax filing, the UAW had net assets of over \$1.1 billion. According to UAW statements to the press, its strike fund is on the order of \$790 million.

Below is just a very small sampling of what the UAW doled out money on in 2020 according to its tax report:

- Compensation and financial "disbursements" to the more than 600 individuals on the UAW's national payroll: \$80,275,893
- Compensation and disbursements for the UAW's 14 top executives and directors: \$3,027,994
- Cash paid on new investments: \$65,345,391
- Improvements to the UAW's headquarters, the misnamed Solidarity House, in Detroit: \$6,252,692
- Improvements to the Region 4 office building in Ottawa, Illinois: \$2,535,280

• Improvements to the UAW's offices in Washington D.C.: \$1,028,020

It must be noted, given the UAW's well-documented record of graft and criminality, that the expenditures and incomes recorded in its tax filing are only the official, "over the table" transactions. Just Thursday, former UAW President Gary Jones, who oversaw the union during the sellout of the 2019 General Motors and Mack Truck strikes, was sentenced to 28 months in prison after pleading guilty to embezzling up to \$1.5 million in union funds, which financed lavish meals, trips and other goods.

The UAW national headquarters employs large numbers of staff with dubious purposes. Out of an official headcount of roughly 660, there are more than 250 "servicing reps" (servicing whom, exactly?), more than 130 "assistants" of various ranks, as well as 65 "secretaries" and some 25 typists and stenographers.

Many of these seemingly humdrum, non-descript titles nevertheless come along with the types of salaries (not to mention perks) pulled down by junior corporate executives. There are over 450 individuals on the UAW's national payroll earning more than \$100,000 a year, or nearly 70 percent of its total reported staff. Of these, 17 earn more than \$200,000 a year.

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

While the UAW is starving workers on the picket lines and saying they can't receive their strike pay for another 10 days, it is continuing to cut checks totaling in the thousands of dollars each for this bloated staff, which feeds leech-like on workers' dues money.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote during the 2019 General Motors strike, for decades the strike fund has been used by UAW executives as a multimillion-dollar piggy bank:

In 1980, the UAW first amended its constitution to facilitate direct cash transfers from the strike fund to UAW salary payments and other expenses. At that time, 50 percent of all interest and dividends from UAW investments in the strike fund were directed to a fund set up by the union executives for salary and other non-strike expenses. In 1989, this was raised to 75 percent, and in 2006 the UAW moved to siphon off 100 percent of interest and revenue from strike fund investments.

Through the 1990s and 2000s, the UAW transferred large amounts of money out of the strike fund, including \$50 million in 1995, \$75 million in 2002, \$60 million in 2006 and \$160 million from 2010-13. Last year, the UAW agreed to transfer another \$25 million from the strike fund. As a result, the UAW now spends significant amounts of money derived from the strike fund on non-strike-related activity.

It is increasingly apparent that both Volvo *and* the well-paid officials in the UAW are seeking to fight dirty with workers. Since the beginning of the second strike, the company has cut off workers' health benefits, sent out termination letters, and brought in scabs in an effort to keep production running.

At the same time, workers have told the WSWS that they feel as though they're being "punished" by the union for twice rejecting its pro-company deals.

The UAW is above all concerned to keep the strike isolated. It has not posted about Volvo workers on its national Facebook page since April 30, when it shut down the first strike and announced a tentative agreement. It has published nothing on its website about the second strike, which is now nearing the end of its first week.

There is no plausible explanation for this silence that does not point to one unavoidable conclusion: The UAW is deliberately keeping its hundreds of thousands of members in the dark about the strike.

The information blackout reflects the real fear on the part of the UAW that if the defiance of Volvo workers, and their organization independently of the union in a rank-and-file committee, is learned about by wider sections of workers, it will spark an uncontrollable rebellion.

Volvo and Mack workers can contact the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee at volvowrfc@gmail.com or by text to (540) 307-0509.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact