

Tennessee educators stand with striking Volvo workers!

Tennessee Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
11 June 2021

The Tennessee Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee stands in solidarity with the 3,000 workers at the Volvo Trucks plant in Dublin, Virginia who have rejected the agreement brokered by the UAW and this week returned to the picket lines. The actions of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee serve as a model for educators and workers everywhere to take the initiative to organize an independent opposition to the pro-corporate unions.

Teachers are familiar with the sting of betrayal from their unions. In 2020-21, union leaders stood by while educators were forced into unsafe classrooms as COVID-19 killed millions across the globe. American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten recently assured the Biden administration, “There is no doubt: Schools must be open. In person. Five days a week.” With those words, she sent the teachers who elected her back into classrooms without any guarantee for their safety, while protecting the profits of capital. In 2018, the teachers unions isolated and shut down powerful strikes in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona, in complete disregard for the demands of the rank-and-file.

When schools in Nashville-Davidson County and Memphis-Shelby County resisted fully reopening schools earlier this year, millionaire Governor Bill Lee and the Republican-controlled state legislature threatened to cut funding for schools in both municipalities and their tens of thousands of students.

The schools superintendent in Memphis—often listed as the poorest city of its size in the nation—agreed to reopen schools the day after he admitted to getting a letter from the head of the Greater Memphis Chamber of Commerce.

In February of this year, Lee stripped state-run health departments of their ability to close schools in an

emergency of any sort. His legislation effectively circumvents the power of health departments to close schools, while also granting school boards and charter schools’ governing boards the power to keep schools open, regardless of the health risks. The governor can also veto school board decisions through an executive order, in effect ensuring that schools remain open.

The multi-millionaire governor, whose home is a 1,000-acre horse and cattle farm in the state’s richest county, serves the interests of the Business Roundtable and Chamber of Commerce. Like his counterparts across the US and globally, he has forced the reopening of schools so that parents will return to offices, factories and plants to produce corporate profits.

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

In the face of all of these attacks, the teachers unions in Nashville-Davidson County (MNEA) and Memphis-Shelby County (MSCEA) have consistently failed to make any effort at all to keep schools closed and protect teachers, students and school employees. Like the UAW, the union bureaucrats in these locals, as well as the AFT, National Education Association (NEA) and Tennessee Education Association (TEA) serve only themselves, not the workers who pay them dues.

Moreover, the actions of Tennessee’s Republican governor and Republican-dominated legislature are fully in line with the policies of the Democratic Party. The entire ruling establishment is united in the aim of reopening schools and forcing parents back to work to shore up the profits of the super-rich and the large corporations at the expense of the lives of workers.

Workers must therefore fight independently. The more unified we are, the more powerful we will be. Teachers in Tennessee stand with the striking Volvo

workers and call on all teachers and workers everywhere to support your fight and take up a common struggle. Workers across all industries and professions must fight to build the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) and put an end to the exploitation of the ruling class and the betrayal of our corporatist unions.



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