

# Workers in Britain support striking US Volvo workers

**Our reporters**  
**14 June 2021**

The strike by Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia, United States, after decisively voting down a second sellout agreement pushed by the United Auto Workers (UAW), has inspired workers throughout the US and internationally.

WSWS reporters spoke to workers in Britain who sent their support and solidarity to Volvo workers.

Around 400 bus drivers employed at **Go North West's Queens Road depot in Manchester** recently mounted an indefinite strike against their employer's plans to "fire and rehire" them on inferior contracts. After 11 weeks on strike, the Go North West action ended on May 17 after the Unite union reached a sellout agreement with the company, owned by global transport conglomerate Go-Ahead.

Speaking to WSWS reporters Monday, a **Go North West driver of eight years** urged the Volvo workers to "stick together. You need solidarity." He said of the situation facing workers following Unite's sellout, "The rosters here are terrible. We used to work eight hours. It's nine hours plus now. They'll see it here, then Stagecoach and Arriva [other bus companies] will do the same. All Volvo plants should unite completely."

Another driver said, "Good luck. We came back with the same contract. The only thing they took out was fire and rehire. Five out of seven union reps took severance pay."

In reference to the Volvo workers setting up a rank-and-file committee, which played a major role in workers throwing out the two union-backed contacts, a **driver of 20 years** said, "I support the Volvo workers. If you have independent committees, it might work better for us."

Last year, the Socialist Equality Party (UK) initiated the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Committee, to mobilise workers to demand a safe workplace during the pandemic by opposing Unite's alliance with bus companies.

**David O'Sullivan, a leading member of the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee, victimised for defending his colleagues**, said, "I fully support your courageous struggle. The road you have taken is not the road of least resistance, but it is one based on workers' own interests. For far too long, organisations like the UAW and their counterparts in Britain have masqueraded as 'unions' while doing back door deals that serve the corporations. Your principled stand is breaking the chain of defeats by these pro-company organisations. Your decision to resume strike action and reject the company-UAW demands for 'sacrifice' is a model that will inspire workers everywhere.

"According to the latest Forbes rich list, just 2,755 people are worth \$13.1 trillion. During the pandemic, the billionaires worldwide have increased their wealth by \$8 trillion. A new billionaire was created

every 17 hours. According to Forbes, Jeff Bezos is 'worth' \$177 billion!

"Your fight raises fundamental issues of strategy and leadership. Should workers accept a society dominated by the dictates of billionaires and company shareholders? Volvo is a global corporation. It works based on an international strategy. The bus companies in London are no different. They operate globally and employ hundreds of thousands of workers around the world. That's why Volvo workers, like bus drivers, need new organisations of struggle with an international strategy.

"Last September, out of the bitter experience of bus drivers during the pandemic, we formed the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee. We did not accept the union's call for 'industrial harmony,' we did not accept their denial of our safety and we did not accept that workers should die to protect the bus companies' 'operational efficiency.' Our lives matter! And our voice is growing because we are meeting the pressing needs of workers for genuine organisations of class struggle.

"Your own committee is demonstrating this in practice, elaborating policies and a strategy to win.

"We are seeking affiliation to the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and firmly believe that a global alliance of the working class fighting for socialism will prove unstoppable. We will do everything we can to support you in the struggle that has begun."

**Jason, a driver from the southeast of England**, said, "I stand shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with all the Volvo truck workers in Virginia. The rank-and-file committee is in my view the only real mechanism for change.

"Globalisation is a great word but fraught with its own challenges. Whenever I hear the word globalisation, it always seems that only one side is using it. Why should it be just one-sided? It won't stay that way forever. The workers should also have a global united front. It wouldn't surprise me at all to find bus parts in our small garage made by your factory. The American Constitution, and the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, applies to you all surely, not just the one percent."

**Vincent, a London bus driver** for 16 years, said, "My personal impression from the strike at Volvo is that the union stands on the side of the company. To make a real difference, the Volvo workers need to come out from under their control. Workers can only get the support they need if they create a new body, so I support the step to create a rank-and-file committee—that is the only way to do it. It's what happened here with COVID, the union is not taking any steps to protect the drivers. You need a rebellion against the union.

“The solution also has to be planet-wide. Such a movement can challenge who has ownership of the companies. Biden is running America to please the shareholders. And the companies are there to please the investors, and if they don’t get what they want they just switch to another country.

“They have a plan, the government, the companies, and we need a plan also, because what happens in the US today, the UK will be next.”

Other workers responded with messages of solidarity, including **gas engineer Akrawi**. He said, “As a worker, I strongly support the strike of my fellow workers in Volvo, and I ask the owners of the company and the authorities not to reject the demands of the workers.

“My dear comrades, the strike is our way today to impose our demands and win our rights. Our insistence on moving forward and not hesitating and conceding is a rehearsal process through which we learn.

“In our class strength, and in every strike, we learn new methods in the struggle with our class enemy in how to impose retreats on it. That is an important lesson from which we learn to move forward towards our revolution and deal the final blow to our enemy and defeat it forever. Victory is yours and death to the theft of our labour power and our rights and freedom.”

Retired worker **Tony Demetriou** said, “They have declared all-out war on the working class to claw back all our hard-won rights. Don’t let them win boys.”

**Emma Spurgin Hussey is an actor and writer** who has appeared in *Poldark* (2015) and *Serpentine* (2018) and is the co-artistic director of the Bedlam Theatre Company of Cornwall. She sent a message reading, “Sending support and solidarity from Cornwall, UK.”

**Mental health worker James Crump** wrote, “My wholehearted support and solidarity for the Volvo workers in their continued resistance to the UAW’s attempts to impose a sellout contract on them. You have seen through the subservience of the petit-bourgeois bureaucrats of the UAW to a pro-company agenda, consequently establishing a rank-and-file committee to fight for your own independent interests, and are now remaining steadfast in the face of the union bureaucracy’s naked attempts at intimidation.

“This authoritative example of insurgent industrial action has not gone unnoticed in the US, or the UK, or elsewhere in Europe and internationally: to the contrary, in all these places, workers are standing in solidarity with you in your struggle against intensified exploitation, under conditions of a global pandemic.”

**Chris Porter is a lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University**. His message of support read, “It’s inspiring to know that workers in the US are organising and taking strike action in rank-and-file defiance of corporate bosses and union leadership.

“Workers around the world need to know about this, to show what is possible outside of the limited and limiting actions and concessions pushed by our unions. The corporate media ignore your story because they know it not only threatens capitalist interests, but also exposes the pseudo-left layers that keep workers’ disenchantment directed towards safe ground. Keep fighting, you’re a real inspiration.”

**Malcolm Bray is a former coal miner** from Yorkshire. He said, “I think the stand taken by the Volvo workers sends an important message to every worker not just in the US, but throughout the world.

“Many workers in struggle are facing the same issues, the independence of workers is the only viable answer in striving for any form of victory. They are recognising that they are not just taking on the company they work for but also their own union that claims to

represent them. Millions of workers around the world are facing these same betrayals by union representatives who are earning massive salaries we pay for. But workers are now recognizing this and are fighting back just like the Volvo workers. With me it was the National Union of Mineworkers in 1984-85, just as it is now with Volvo workers and the UAW.”

“They are ‘unions’ by name only, they gave up long ago being organisations for the benefit of workers. What the Volvo workers are now expressing is a real defiance against the unions. The only way forward from this is to make a conscious political break from them, and to build new organisations of struggle in the form of rank-and-file committees. The unions are by their very nature embedded in the financial structures of capitalism. Often, they are run as businesses making profits for them, that you pay to represent you.

“Whether it is workers at Volvo in the US or workers in Sri Lanka, workers are facing the same struggles, and the same kind of unions. It is universal.

“Having endured the defeat of the miners’ strike in 1984-85, I believe the biggest lessons are that of isolation and that militancy alone is not enough. The unions isolate workers with the deliberate intent to demoralise and then to defeat. That was what clearly happened with the NUM and the miners of 1984-85. The fact is that the union did not have a perspective to win, 12 months of struggle lay testament to that.

“Corporations and the unions have massive resources at their disposal to achieve whatever they want, as long as it’s not in the interest of workers. In understanding this, workers at Volvo and workers around the world must make a conscious decision to alter this trend in their favour, and not that of the massive corporations and the unions, and build independent rank-and-file committees. If not, it can only end in defeat. What has been clear is that workers are willing to fight but the unions are not.

“The past four decades has been one of defeats for workers the world over. If strikes break out, they are quickly suppressed by the unions. The world crisis of capitalism is the driving force behind such actions. Workers must understand the essence of the global struggle and fight as one ‘class,’ hence Marx’s battle cry, ‘Workers of the world unite.’ In Tunisia [in 2010-11] we witnessed a revolution and again in Egypt, yet they were suppressed. The building of independent rank-and-file committees is the key to reverse the trend of defeats that workers pay for dearly.

“A defeat of workers impacts on them for years to come. After the miners’ strike the attacks got worse for miners and their families. It led to the destruction of the mining industry in the UK, primarily to satisfy the interests of finance capital. It condemned whole communities, and these defeats had consequences for other workers.

“I send my fraternal and comradely support to the heroic struggle of the Volvo workers and the building of allied rank-and-file committees.”



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