

“We should all strike to show the CEOs we mean business”

Growing calls for united struggle with striking Volvo workers as UAW moves to resume backroom talks

Jerry White
15 June 2021

Talks between officials from the United Auto Workers International, UAW Local 2069 and Volvo Trucks North America were set to resume Tuesday but were canceled according to striking workers at Volvo’s New River Valley (NRV) plant in Dublin, Virginia. Nearly 3,000 workers at the truck manufacturing plant have been on strike since June 7 after decisively voting down two pro-company contracts pushed by the UAW.

On Monday night, Local 2069 President Matt Blondino told strike captains, “The company has reached out to the [UAW] International Heavy Truck dept. and the Local Bargaining Team. Negotiations will have discussions starting tomorrow with them.” By Tuesday, however, neither the local nor the UAW International released any further details, and calls to Volvo’s media spokesman by the *World Socialist Web Site* were not returned.

Workers denounced the UAW’s maneuvers as a cynical ploy. “The UAW is just going along with this cat-and-mouse game to screw with our emotions,” one worker told the WSWS. “It’s the kind of theatre you saw with Nancy Pelosi and Trump. They can tell you this or that, but in the end, they’re working together against us, and the majority of workers know it. We’re in this fight for the long haul,” he said.

Workers voted down the last proposal recommended by UAW Secretary Treasurer Ray Curry and regional and local officials by 90 percent on June 6. The deal would have raised wages by only 2 percent a year over six years, meaning a significant cut in real wages given the soaring costs of consumer goods. It also would have kept in place the despised two-tier wage and benefit system, sharply increased out-of-pocket medical costs, cut retiree benefits, and established a new 10-hour workday with no overtime

payments after eight hours of work.

The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued an open letter on Tuesday to UAW President Rory Gamble, Curry, and UAW Local 2069 President Matt Blondino. The statement demands to know what the UAW is proposing to the company, why the UAW is providing only \$275 a week in strike pay out of a strike fund of \$790 million, and what the UAW and AFL-CIO are doing to mobilize their 400,000 and 12.5 million members respectively to win the strike.

It details workers’ demands for substantial wage and benefit gains and the mobilization of UAW members to support the strike, beginning with the shutdown of all Volvo operations in the US. The statement concludes, “If you are not prepared to carry out such a fight, then get out. The rank-and-file will elect a bargaining and strike committee of its own that is prepared to carry out the struggle that is required.”

The open letter was widely circulated and enthusiastically received by workers on the picket lines. “They read the letter and were especially angry about the UAW spending \$6.2 million to remodel their headquarters in Detroit,” one Volvo worker told the WSWS. “They were saying that the UAW is nothing but a bunch of thieves. The workers put a pine coffin up at the entrance of Volvo for the scabs and contractors. When they read the open letter in a post, they said they should put it in front of the UAW hall for Matt [Blondino] and the rest!”

Another striker said, “The UAW says the strike is about everything, but they don’t give any details. We’ll be slaves to our jobs without real wage hikes. A lot of people here have been schooled on inflation, and they say we need COLA [cost of living adjustment]. Before it wasn’t

a big deal, but now it is with the rising costs at the gas pump and for groceries.”

There is also widespread support for the strike among workers at Mack-Volvo plants in Allentown, Pennsylvania and Hagerstown, Maryland. The New River Valley plant paints cabs for trucks assembled in Macungie, Pennsylvania and uses engines and transmissions from the Hagerstown plant. Both plants had temporary layoffs this week.

“Volvo wanted to ramp up production at our plant because Mack needed more cabs,” one striking worker said. “But with us going on strike and the microchip problem, there are shortages for the Macungie plant and they’re laying off. They should just go on strike and hit the picket line so we can all have one voice.”

The UAW has imposed a news blackout on the Volvo strike, fearing that it could spark a broader movement of workers. The UAW International does not have a single word about the ongoing walkout on its website or Facebook page. The websites and social media pages of UAW Local 677 and Local 171, which cover thousands of Mack-Volvo workers in Allentown and Hagerstown, have likewise posted nothing on the strike at NRV.

The websites and social media outlets of the national and Virginia AFL-CIO have also maintained their silence. So have the United Mine Workers, United Steelworkers and Massachusetts Nurses Association, which are currently isolating strikes and struggles by workers at Warrior Met Coal, ATI, ExxonMobil and Saint Vincent Hospital in Worcester.

The president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, Sarah Nelson, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), who is being promoted as potentially the next president of the AFL-CIO, said nothing about the Volvo strike at a rally last Saturday as the Worcester nurses neared the 100th day of their strike.

Among workers who have learned about the strike, largely through the *World Socialist Web Site*, there is widespread support for the Volvo workers and a determination to join in a common struggle.

Responding to the Volvo workers’ open letter, Rob, a young worker at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly plant in suburban Detroit, said, “Their letter is immaculate and should be a blueprint all autoworkers should follow. The demands they present are truly on par with what’s necessary for the prosperity of the working class. All auto workers should follow suit and do everything in their power to help those on the picket lines.”

Referring to the job actions workers took in defiance of the UAW in March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was spreading through the plants, Rob said, “The wildcat strike was a big deal! It showed exactly what solidarity of autoworkers can do. The first obstacle for all of us, Volvo and the Detroit auto companies, is the UAW.”

“The Volvo workers are fighting for everyone,” a Stellantis worker in Indiana told the WSWS. “We have the same issues. We are all being abused and used regarding our health and safety, working conditions, schedules, benefits and pay.

“By voting down their contract, it speaks volumes. They weren’t going to go along with what was presented. The union proved they didn’t care by making them go back to work to make more trucks after a two-week strike last month. Their demands have to be met, or they won’t work.”

Referring to the strike pay as a “joke,” she said, “\$275 would only pay for gas for a month. People have bills. We have to eat, pay mortgages, car insurance, and a host of other obligations we are responsible to pay. They are trying to starve the Volvo workers and con them back to work by offering as little money and benefits as possible. Having a strike is very necessary so the workers can get their basic needs met. I wish we all could strike to let the CEOs know we mean business.”

An electrical worker at Warren Truck who has been a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) union for 34 years said he wasn’t surprised that the UAW did not tell workers in Michigan about the strike. “They’re sweeping it under the rug. They’ve been doing it for years in the IBEW. Every time we try to get a raise, it comes back out of our insurance, so we don’t get a raise. It doesn’t go in our pocket. They just fill Washington D.C. and the AFL-CIO with money. That’s what they do.

“It’s the same thing with the UAW. So, the Volvo workers have got to keep fighting, and don’t give up.”

The World Socialist Web Site urges all workers to read and share the Volvo workers’ open letter to the UAW. Workers can contact the VWRFC at volvowrfc@gmail.com or text to (540) 307-0509.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)