

“If the union will not fight for us, we have to figure out how to fight for ourselves”

Detroit autoworkers declare support for striking Volvo Truck workers in Virginia

Jerry White
16 June 2021

Detroit autoworkers have expressed strong support for the striking Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia. Nearly 3,000 workers walked out of the Swedish multinational’s largest truck manufacturing plant in the world on June 7, after decisively rejecting a second pro-company contract backed by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union.

Supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* spoke to Stellantis (formerly Fiat Chrysler) workers during the shift change at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit Wednesday afternoon. Many of the workers did not initially know about the strike due to the news blackout by the corporate media and the UAW, which has published nothing on its web site or Facebook page, nor done anything to inform factory workers.

To break through this conspiracy of silence and build up support for the striking workers, supporters of the WSWS distributed hundreds of copies of the *Autoworker Newsletter*, which contained the open letter to the UAW released by the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee on Tuesday.

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.”

One young worker with two years at the Stellantis plant

said, “I support the striking Volvo workers. Right now, no one is speaking for the workers. If the union will not fight for us, we have to figure out how to fight for ourselves.

“If we don’t stand up, the UAW will keep sticking it to us, like they did when they said that TPTs (temporary part-time workers) would get vacation time and PAA (Paid Absence Allowance) before we got rolled over to full-time. We have been waiting for two years and haven’t gotten it. The union and the company just change the agreement without us knowing.”

Many workers were angry that the UAW was concealing the strike from them. Others identified with the Volvo workers when campaigners told them that the same UAW officials who took bribes from Fiat Chrysler to sign pro-company contracts that took away their rights, had also negotiated the contracts at Volvo. They responded with enthusiasm when campaigners told them that the Volvo workers had voted down two UAW-backed contracts by 90-91 percent and were fighting to abolish the two-tier wage and benefit system, win substantial raises and benefit improvements for current and retired workers, and defend the eight-hour day.

One worker said: “I agree with the Volvo workers’ demand for COLA (Cost of Living Adjustment) because gas, food and everything else is going up. As for the \$275 in strike pay, the UAW has more than enough to pay them what they need. Our union dues keep going up and up. They tell us it’s for the strike fund, but when the workers need it, the UAW won’t give it to them.”

Other workers shouted statements of support as they rushed in or out of the factory. “Tell them to stay strong,” one said. Another said, “stick together” and “we’re with them.” Yet another worker said, “Fight for what you believe in, because this is your life.” Several workers stopped to be photographed holding signs saying “I support the Volvo

workers” to show their solidarity with their brothers and sisters in Virginia.

After the shift change, one of the young campaigners told the WSWS: "The support I saw from workers in the Warren FCA plant for Volvo workers on the other side of the country was inspiring. It shows plainly how the struggle of workers is shared regardless of different locations, different companies or even different industries. We had electrical workers come out who didn't even work for the plant, and they understood the fight against the UAW."

On Tuesday, the UAW Local 2069 Facebook page informed striking workers in Virginia that local, UAW International and Volvo officials met briefly via teleconference on Tuesday morning but had not resumed negotiations as local union officials claimed they would. "At this time there is no definite date when formal negotiations will resume. Sorry for any confusion on other posts."

This drew angry comments from Volvo workers, including one who posted, "And we find this out 2 days after the fact. Do these ppl realize that the information they get is our information?" Denouncing the "guys negotiating the contract," the worker demanded, "STOP KEEPING SECRETS THAT JUST MAKES US DISLIKE U EVEN MORE!!!!!! YALL ARE STARTING TO ACT JUST LIKE OUR GOVERNMENT!!"

Striking workers at the New River Valley (NRV) plant are also in touch with their counterparts at Mack-Volvo plants in Allentown, Pennsylvania, which assembles trucks with cabs painted in Virginia, and Hagerstown, Maryland, where engines and transmissions are built and shipped to Virginia, where Volvo-brand trucks are assembled. Although workers at the Pennsylvania and Maryland plants are already being hit by layoffs due to a combination of the impact of the NRV strike on painted cabs and a shortage of microchips, the UAW has kept the remaining workers in the plants on the job in a deliberate effort to divide workers who all work for the same corporate giant.

"One worker told me Mack will not have any truck cabs soon," a striker told the WSWS. "Managers are on the production lines but they can't run things properly so they can't make enough cabs. Two people said that Mack was already running low. Before the strike they were trying to get as many cabs as they could to keep Mack open in case we walked out.

"I don't believe they are cutting shifts at Mack due to semiconductor shortages. Although some people think that, here at NRV they still had us work on trucks without the chips, and then set them aside to complete them later. There are unfinished trucks everywhere in Dublin, at the Fairgrounds, everywhere; you can't fit two thousand trucks inside NRV facilities alone."

Referring to the open letter from the rank-and-file committee, he said: "Workers are eating it up and people are really starting to come around. I can't believe the strike fund issue. They could easily pay us \$500 per week and have plenty of money left in their \$760 million fund. I've done the math. And the UMWA looks just as bad toward the Alabama miners on strike, if not worse."

He concluded: "I feel like now everybody is supporting us all over the world, people are talking about that here. People don't know what they are capable of. We should make the rules, not the big guys. We should have a contract every year, if we don't like it tell them to go screw themselves. Contracts should be yearly, short and sweet. We should have COLA. It's not rocket science. I am at Volvo mostly for the insurance, which had been okay, but now they want to pound our faces in the concrete. Volvo wants to jack up premiums from \$16 to \$40 or \$50 and deductibles from \$750 to \$6,000 and more."

"There is a lot of agreement with everything in the open letter," another striking worker said. "I saw the statements of support for Volvo workers from around the world on the WSWS. It's motivating to see that we are not the only ones fighting this crap and treading through this uphill battle. Hopefully we can band everybody together and we can all win together. I'd like to talk to them and meet them in person. I notice how the autoworkers in Detroit were saying that during the pandemic they were essential workers, then they get crapped on. That seems to be the norm! Volvo said we were essential and then they demand a pay cut. It irritates me that these companies are making billions while we fight for scraps. In the auto industry bailouts, the CEOs walked away with huge severance, for what? For running the companies into the ground?"

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