

Break the isolation of the strike of the Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia!

Joseph Kishore
17 June 2021

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on Volvo workers and all autoworkers to come to the support of the nearly 3,000 striking Volvo Trucks workers at the New River Valley (NRV) plant in Dublin, Virginia.

The Volvo workers have been on strike now for more than 10 days, following their overwhelming rejection, by 90 percent, of a second tentative agreement brought back by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union. The workers are demanding a significant increase in wages to make up for previous concessions, a cost-of-living escalator clause to meet the soaring cost of consumer goods, an end to the multilayer wage and benefit system, the preservation of the eight-hour day, and full health care for current workers and retirees.

The Volvo workers at NRV face a war on two fronts. First, they are waging a battle against a multinational corporation with more than \$50 billion in annual revenue and more than \$4 billion in annual profits. Volvo management, with the support of the entire capitalist state, is determined to intensify the exploitation of workers to pay for the billions of dollars it is handing out to its major shareholders.

Volvo NRV General Manager Franky Marchand released a statement Thursday declaring that the company will not return to the bargaining table until “the process for the new round of negotiations is clear to all”—that is, until it can receive assurances from the UAW that a new agreement will be ratified without failure.

Marchand added that what he found “most troubling is the stress the process is putting between all of us, which is uncharacteristic of our community.” What is really “troubling” Volvo is the fact that it is being forced to take the will of the workers into account. When the second contract was voted down earlier this month, Marchand released a statement saying that “it is difficult to understand this action,” because the agreement had been endorsed by the “UAW International, Regional and Local

leadership.”

What Marchand finds “difficult to understand” is that the traditional “process” of contract ratification—whereby the company tells the UAW what it wants, and the UAW forces it through with lies and threats—has broken down, due to the interference of the workers themselves.

Late Thursday afternoon, Volvo announced that it had agreed with the UAW to resume negotiations on June 23, that is, not for another week. This makes clear that management is determined to crush the strike while workers are strung out on the picket lines. The company has already canceled health care for the striking workers and is utilizing state police deployed by the Virginia’s Democratic governor to bring in scab labor to continue operations.

The second front of the war is against the UAW itself, which is doing everything it can to isolate Volvo workers. It does not have a strategy for victory but a strategy for defeat.

Responding to Marchand, UAW Local 2069 President Matt Blondino released a statement with vague promises that the UAW was “working hard to address the shortcomings from previous tentative agreements that membership rightfully so wants the company to address.” With cap in hand, Blondino begs the company to resume negotiations while complaining that “they want to test our mettle on the strike line.”

Blondino, however, said nothing about what the UAW is actually proposing that is different from the “shortcomings” of two contracts that were overwhelmingly rejected by Volvo workers. Nor did he care to explain why the UAW and Blondino personally campaigned so aggressively for them if workers “rightfully” thought they did not meet their needs. Most significantly, Blondino did not suggest that the UAW would do anything to win the strike. Instead, the UAW is doing everything to undermine the mettle of workers by

starving them on the picket lines and leaving them isolated.

In an effort to organize opposition and break free from the UAW-imposed isolation of their struggle, workers at NRV have formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC).

On Monday, the VWRFC issued a powerful open letter to UAW International President Rory Gamble, UAW Secretary-Treasurer Ray Curry and Blondino. The letter demands that the UAW explain what it is proposing to the company that is different from what it proposed in the two agreements that were overwhelmingly rejected. It also demands that the UAW explain why workers are only being paid a poverty-level \$275 a week in strike pay, despite the massive resources possessed by the UAW.

The letter emphasizes the UAW's isolation of the strike. It notes that the UAW International Facebook page has not posted a single notice about the strike, and that workers at other plants, including autoworkers, have said that they do not even know about it. "You claim to be our representatives," the open letter states, "yet we see that on every front your actions are undermining our strike."

In its effort to isolate the strike, Volvo and the UAW have the critical assistance of the media and the entire political establishment, from the right to the pseudo-left. The *New York Times*, the main mouthpiece of the Democratic Party, has not published a single article on the resumption of the strike this month. Nor has the *Washington Post*, which includes Virginia as part of its local coverage. Neither have the network and cable news television programs reported on the strike. *Jacobin* magazine, affiliated with a faction of the Democratic Socialists of America, has not written on it, and the DSA itself has issued no statement.

It is the working class that must organize support for the Volvo NRV workers. This begins with the Volvo and Volvo-Mack workers in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia. The UAW is keeping 3,500 workers on the line at Volvo-Mack plants, even as the company is beginning to implement layoffs due to a shortage of supplies caused by the NRV strike.

Volvo is an international company, with operations in Europe, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa. It is necessary to bring to the attention of Volvo workers in every country the struggle of their brothers and sisters in Dublin, Virginia.

Support must be extended to all autoworkers, who face the same conditions. When informed about the strike at Volvo, autoworkers at the Big Three plants and the parts

plants express full support and a desire for a joint struggle. News of the stand taken at NRV must be spread far and wide, breaking the blackout imposed by the UAW and the media.

The strike at Volvo, moreover, is part of a series of struggles throughout the United States that reflect a growing mood of anger and rebellion, including the strike of Warrior Met coal miners in Alabama; nurses in Worcester, Massachusetts; and ATI steelworkers in Pennsylvania and other states. In Beaumont, Texas, oil workers at ExxonMobil have been locked out in their fight to preserve jobs and defend safety conditions.

In every case, the unions—the United Mine Workers of America, Massachusetts Nurses Association and the United Steelworkers—are employing the same methods as the UAW. They are isolating the struggles, while telling workers nothing about the strike that has erupted at Volvo. This must be ended.

The ruling class response to the pandemic, the massive growth of social inequality, and the soaring cost of basic goods are fueling a growth of the class struggle throughout the world. Miners in Canada are currently on strike against Vale Inco after rejecting a contract brought back by the United Steelworkers. In India, autoworkers have engaged in strike action in an effort to stop production amidst the expanding coronavirus pandemic. Miners throughout Latin America have launched strike action against unsafe conditions.

In organizing an independent rank-and-file committee, workers at Volvo have created a new power at NRV—the workers themselves. This initiative must be extended throughout Volvo, the auto industry and beyond, in the United States and internationally, to develop in the working class a united counteroffensive against capitalist exploitation and inequality.

The isolation of the Volvo strike must be broken!

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on all workers to distribute the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee's open letter as widely as possible. Send it to your co-workers, friends and family members and post it on social media. Send your messages of support to volvowrfc@gmail.com. Contact the WSWS for assistance in forming a rank-and-file committee at your workplace.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact