

UAW and Volvo Trucks announce negotiations to resume June 23, as UAW works to isolate strike in Dublin, Virginia

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19 June 2021

After keeping striking Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia in the dark about the state of negotiations with corporate management, United Auto Workers national and local officials released perfunctory statements Thursday to try to mollify the anger of workers who decisively rejected two UAW-backed contracts over the last month.

Nearly 3,000 workers walked out on June 7, determined to recoup the wages they lost over the last three UAW contracts, win a cost-of-living escalator clause to protect workers against the impact of inflation, abolish the two-tier wage and benefit system and protect healthcare benefits for current and retired workers.

Earlier this week, UAW Local 2069 President Matt Blondino announced that formal negotiations between Volvo, the UAW International and the local would resume on Tuesday, without saying a word about what, if anything, the UAW planned to demand. By Tuesday evening, workers were told that only a brief meeting was held and there was no date for a return to the bargaining table.

By Thursday, UAW International Secretary-Treasurer Ray Curry, who negotiated the two previous sellout deals, released a letter to the local union members titled "UAW Volvo Negotiations Update #1"—on the tenth day of the strike! In it, he says, "the Local Union Bargaining Committee, the UAW International Union, and Volvo representatives" met on Tuesday, but "Unfortunately, no progress was made during this meeting."

Curry says the union offered to return to the table as soon as possible "but the company has not offered any dates to meet on your issues." He continues: "Your continued solidarity is critical to bring the company to the table to reach a fair and equitable agreement for the membership." Curry's references to a "fair and equitable" deal could not be vaguer, and it commits the UAW to absolutely nothing.

Later that day (Thursday, June 17) Franky Marchand, the manager at New River Valley assembly plant, published a statement on Volvo Group's website. Beyond the corporate pleasantries, the statement reiterated Volvo's ruthless determination to enforce a contract "to ensure the plant's

competitiveness and fuel long-term stability and growth." This will include "unavoidable health care cost-sharing increases."

Marchand cryptically defined the company's terms for resuming negotiations: "[W]e will return to the bargaining table when the process for the new round of negotiations is clear to all." Marchand previously expressed his shock that workers had overwhelmingly rejected an offer the UAW International and local leaders had signed on to and promised management that workers would accept. In other words, the normal "process" of the company telling the UAW what it wants and the UAW imposing on the workers failed—because the workers got in the way—and Volvo wants assurances this won't happen again.

As if on cue, at 4:01 p.m. Thursday afternoon, UAW local 2069 President Matt Blondino made a Facebook post addressing Volvo's public statement, saying, "We have been requesting bargaining sessions. Volvo has refused to schedule these discussions. That is a sign that they want to test our mettle on the strike line.

Blondino added, "And I can only thank you again for standing together strong—for not allowing the company or outside groups to divide us. We win in solidarity with each other. We lose when outsiders divide us on the picket line."

Then at 4:24 p.m.—within half an hour of this mealy-mouthed post—Volvo Group updated its statement from earlier in the day and announced it would return to the bargaining table next Wednesday. The Facebook page for local 2069 quickly touted this as a victory.

The exchange of letters is little more than kabuki theatre—a trading of public jabs while behind the scenes both the UAW and management discuss what specific combination of dirty tricks, playacting, strikebreaking and starving workers on \$275 a week in strike pay—is needed to beat back the powerful resistance of the workers and impose management's dictates.

Blondino's principal concern is indicated by his reference to the supposedly nefarious activity of "outside groups" who are trying to "divide us."

By "outside groups," Blondino is referring to the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), which was established to organize workers independently of the UAW.

According to the police mind of Blondino, the massive rejection of the UAW-backed contracts can only be explained by “outside agitators.”

It is no secret that the *World Socialist Web Site* has campaigned for the formation of rank-and-file committees and assisted Volvo workers in developing a committee at NRV. However, the activities of “outside groups” cannot explain why 91 percent of Volvo workers voted to reject two tentative agreements. As for “dividing” workers, the workers at NRV are entirely united—against the UAW’s sellouts.

The letters of Marchand and Blondino were released just two days after the VWRFC released its open letter to the UAW. 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 strike pay, despite the massive resources possessed by the UAW.

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 choreographed statements by the UAW and Volvo management have only angered workers more. This was apparent by the posts from workers on the UAW Local 2069 Facebook page responding angrily to Blondino’s announcement that negotiations would resume next week.

“Why did it take two strikes and two 90 percent ‘no’ votes for you to start listening to the members’ concerns?” one worker asked.

Another worker doubled down:

Matt Blondino, that was a direct question to you [referring to the post above]. Now answer it. We told you what we wanted and twice you ignored us. The ONLY thing that’s made you, this bargaining committee, this international, and this company even acknowledge we exist is twice a 90 percent ‘no’ vote. We should NEVER have been told to go back in without a ratified contract. You, this committee, this international, and this company were firmly convinced we would roll over the first time around. It was expected of us. Guess what, you, this committee, this international, and this company are finding out exactly what the mettle of this membership really is. Bring us what we want, or 90 percent of us will say ‘no’ again. We are DONE playing games with all y’all. Oh, and quit worrying about who can write the most snarky letters. WE. WANT. A. CONTRACT.

Another post upbraided the UAW for promoting two back-to-back sellout proposals (tentative agreements, or TAs 1 and 2) as well as the contemptuous reaction by union leaders to both of the “no” votes. It stated:

The bargaining team all agreed to bring TA1 back as well as TA2. They signed their names to both agreements. The bargaining team voted yes on TA2 and pushed it on us saying that’s the best we’ll get. When we voted it down again the anger displayed in the union hall the next morning when international informed them of the strike could be heard throughout the hall. ‘They asked for it [a strike] now they’ve got it!’ Make no mistake they do not support us in this strike. But our voices and votes are louder than their faithless, disloyal, fake posts. Stay the course. We know what we want and deserve. We got each other.

Behind the scenes, Volvo and the UAW are discussing how best to dissipate militancy and prevent the development of a broader strike wave.

This is why both Marchand and Blondino spew pleasantries about unity and common interests while decrying division. Both men resent the unanticipated arrival of a third force: the workers themselves, independent of their “union” and organized in the Volvo Workers Rank and File Committee.

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.



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