

Sri Lankan workers support Volvo strikers in the US

Our reporters
21 June 2021

Workers in Sri Lanka have joined their class brothers and sisters around the world to declare their support for the ongoing strike of Volvo workers in the US. About 3,000 workers at the New River Valley (NRV) Volvo Truck plant in Dublin, Virginia, walked out on June 7, after rejecting, for a second time, a pro-company contract presented by the United Auto Workers (UAW).

The statements published below—from workers, students, the Health Workers Action Committee (HWAC) and the Action Committee of Alton Estate Workers (ACAEW)—are powerful examples of how the Volvo workers' struggle is inspiring workers in Sri Lanka and internationally. The HWAC and ACAEW were established with the political assistance of the Socialist Equality Party (Sri Lanka).

The HWAC is playing a decisive role in developing struggles among Sri Lankan health workers. The ACAEW is at the centre of a fight for the unconditional reinstatement of 38 plantation workers at Alton Estate. It is also demanding the withdrawal of frame-up court cases against 26 of these workers, who were targeted in a joint witch-hunt launched by the company and police, with the assistance of the Ceylon Workers Congress, the main plantation union.

Health Workers Action Committee

The struggle by Volvo workers in Virginia against both the company and the UAW, which defends the interests of the corporation, has given us an enormous inspiration. The decisive role played in this struggle, by the independent Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, underscores the historical task assigned to such committees.

We believe that this heroic struggle opens the eyes of workers all over the world. Treacherous organizations everywhere, like the UAW, should be exposed, challenged and purged from the working-class movement.

As we fight against COVID-19 in Sri Lankan hospitals, we are experiencing how the government has endangered us, and the lives of our families, by not providing protective equipment, sufficient staff and a proper living wage.

Earlier this month, President Gotabhaya Rajapakse imposed the essential services order, abolishing the right to

strike and other democratic rights, for nearly one million public sector workers, in an attempt to crush rising class struggles, including by health workers. The trade unions are maintaining a deathly silence over these reactionary regulations, and are attempting to weaken workers' struggles by creating divisions between them.

The initiatives taken by the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, including its open letter to the UAW demanding that the union explain its strategy for victory, contains important lessons for Sri Lankan health workers, who face similar challenges.

We declare that the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee's struggle is a turning point in the fight to build an international network of rank-and-file committees.

The Action Committee of Alton Estate Workers

We, the Action Committee of Alton Estate Workers in Up-Cot, Central Sri Lanka, fully support the Volvo Truck workers' struggle in Virginia. We have learnt important lessons from the analysis and reports published on the WSWS about this struggle.

The workers' rejection of the union's dictates, and their readiness to fight against a massive corporation such as Volvo, in a country like the United States, marks a new stage in the global struggle of the working class against the capitalist system. It is now very clear that the isolation of the struggles of the working class by trade unions, such as the UAW, blocks the global collaboration of workers.

At Alton Estate, our workforce, numbering 500, went on strike for 47 days, demanding wage increases and opposing the estate management's repressive measures in February and March. During the strike, 26 workers were arrested, with 10 of them jailed for 21 days. Although they have been bailed out, the bogus charges against them have not yet been lifted. Thirty-eight workers, including those arrested, have been dismissed from their jobs.

During the strike, we formed an action committee independent of the trade unions, under the political guidance of the SEP. We also initiated a campaign to win working class support in Sri Lanka and internationally for our

struggle to reinstate the 38 workers and for the withdrawal of court action against 26 workers among our colleagues.

The Volvo workers' fight is encouraging, as we intensify our struggle against the plantation unions, including the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), who support the victimisation of workers.

Our action committee fully supports the building of an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees called for by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and regard the Volvo Truck Workers Rank-and-File Committee as one of the most significant developments towards that initiative.

We stand always with the Volvo workers in your courageous fight and the continuation of the struggle to victory!

Sri Lankan industrial worker from the Saudi Arabian industrial city of Al Khobar

The UAW's role in the Volvo workers' struggle makes visible the reactionary character of the trade unions in every corner of the world. Here in Saudi Arabia, workers are not allowed to organize, even in a welfare association. The US-backed Saudi Arabian monarchy has labeled any attempt by workers to organize as treason.

Even though the right to form trade unions was won by workers in previous struggles, the unions have given up defending workers and instead are dedicated to defending corporate profits.

I salute the Volvo workers who have challenged this type of treachery by the UAW. This is the road to victory. I salute the strength and determination of the Virginia Volvo workers!

A construction engineer

I welcome the Volvo workers' initiative as a great achievement. They have demonstrated that the working class is no longer willing to submit to the big corporations and the trade unions, which are totally in favor of further slashing workers' rights and maximizing profits.

I support your struggle! Bring it to victory!

A Sri Lankan IT worker in Chennai, India

I believe workers in manufacturing plants throughout the world should discuss the issues confronting the Volvo workers and mobilize themselves. They can defeat the immense corporate power of companies, such as Volvo, if they do so.

I read on the WSWS how Indian auto workers are supporting Volvo workers. This is a necessary response for the international collaboration of rank-and-file workers. Workers should realize the power of their global unity, which is the path to socialism. The Volvo workers' fight is an eye-opener, and it is important to initiate discussions on rank-and-file committees among IT workers as well.

Amith Weeraman, a young worker from Colombo

I believe that Volvo workers in Virginia have taken a very important step in the right direction. Workers around the world should draw lessons from their struggle. They should form their own independent organizations, separate from the unions, and work towards building an international alliance of these organizations to fight against the injustice they face at the hands of the ruling class.

Rashmika Kodithuwakku, a student from Colombo

I applaud the brave steps taken by the Volvo workers against the pro-corporate union bureaucracy, under conditions where the UAW is trying to end the strike and push through concessions for the company. I would also like to thank the WSWS for reporting on this issue from the beginning, when other media organizations are not covering it. I believe that workers should study the necessary lessons from the past struggles of the working class, brought forward in the analysis published on the WSWS, in order to take their struggles forward.

A technical worker in Colombo port

First of all, I would like to add my congratulations to the Volvo workers' struggle. I am very grateful for the exposure of the agreement between the company and the union, which betrays workers' rights.

The trade unions today are the pawns of capitalism, as we have experienced here in Sri Lanka. They are betraying workers' rights in all sectors, including the ports, health and education. The trade unions have betrayed our struggle against the privatization of the port. This recalls Leon Trotsky's words, "The nature of an organization of workers, such as a trade union, is determined by its relationship to the distribution of national income."

We will all work together to defeat capitalism by forming the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees as suggested at the ICFI's online May Day rally this year.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact