

Bus drivers in Berlin support striking Volvo workers

Andy Niklaus
21 June 2021

The strike of the Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia is winning increasing international support. Here is an address of solidarity from Andy Niklaus, a bus driver with Berlin Public Transportation (BVG) and a member of the Transport Workers' Action Committee for Safe Workplaces in Berlin.

Dear colleagues at the Dublin (Virginia) Volvo Trucks plant in New River Valley,

You are fully justified in rejecting the collective bargaining agreement presented by the management of global player Volvo and the Auto Workers Union (UAW).

Through the *World Socialist Web Site*, we at the Berlin Action Committee of Transport Workers for Safe Workplaces have been following your struggle, which has been simmering for months. You are absolutely right: *enough is enough!*

There must be no more cuts in wages or bonuses. On the contrary, wages must be raised substantially after years of austerity measures. No more destruction of your health! The planned ten-hour shifts are inhumane and must not be introduced under any circumstances. The company must cover the costs of maintaining and restoring your health. In addition, you are entitled to a good pension. No starvation pensions in old age, where social misery and illness would await you!

While the owners of the car companies hand out billions to their shareholders, and the union bosses pocket horrendous sums for their services against you, they want you to foot the bill.

Here in Berlin, and all over Germany, we have the same experience. Fifteen years ago, they cut the wages of us bus drivers by 16 percent, took away other benefits and drastically increased productivity. An entire generation of newly hired drivers—like in the US auto industry—is receiving significantly less pay. They

are left with only 2,000 euro per month to live on, slogging six days, up to 56 hours a week.

This system has been extended to all transport companies in Germany and Europe. Everything was and is subordinated to profit, with the help of the unions and what once were workers' parties.

The pandemic that has been raging for 16 months, worsened by governments with their "herd immunity" policies, has revealed one thing: The capitalist system no longer has a future to offer us workers. Millions of dead and sick, because nothing's allowed to affect profits!

More workers have lost their lives or their health because of the coronavirus than have the capitalists. And the social impact of the pandemic will place immense further costs on the shoulders of the working class if the ruling class' orgies of enrichment are not stopped soon.

The unions here, as in your country, have long ceased to serve the defense of our social interests. They have been transformed into a company police force that represents only the interests of the shareholders and management.

Six weeks ago, we founded our action committee. Through it, we wanted to prevent the front doors of our buses from being used again, which, while unsafe from a social distancing standpoint, they are implementing in order to increase on-bus ticket sales. So far, with the help of our colleagues, we have been successful because we say that the drivers themselves have the right to decide about their health. Our self-confidence has grown. Even under the current conditions, there is a risk of contagion because aerosols can spread in the vehicle—just like on your factory floors. With the opening of the front entrance, it would be even more dangerous for us as drivers.

The union did not and does not help us. It sticks to its line that profits must continue—and with it the mass transit that takes workers to the factories and their children to their schools. It is “part of the risk of life to contract the coronavirus at work,” wrote the Verdi union here in Germany.

Our action committee will continue to politically educate our colleagues and mobilize workers independently of the unions, as now in the case of the dismissed London bus driver Dave O’Sullivan. Because he stood up for the lives of his colleagues and their families, he was fired with the help of the Unite union. Through the WSWS, we learned about it and are making it known around the world. Workers around the world only learned about your struggle and ours through the WSWS.

We will continue to expand this work. We will use the “International Workers Alliance of Action Committees,” initiated by the WSWS on May 1, 2021 to share experiences and coordinate our struggles worldwide.

Stay strong in your struggle. We are on your side!

Andy Niklaus



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact