

Australian Volvo workers back US strikers and call for unified stand

Our reporter
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During a shift change campaign by *World Socialist Web Site* supporters yesterday, numerous workers at the Volvo truck plant in Wacol, Brisbane voiced their support for the strike by the 3,000 Volvo workers in the United States.

About 600 workers are employed by the Volvo Group at the Wacol facility, in the western suburbs of the capital of the Australian state of Queensland, assembling Volvo and Mack cabs and trucks.

The Wacol factory is integrated into a worldwide production process. Headquartered in Sweden, Volvo employs almost 100,000 workers, at interconnected manufacturing facilities, in 18 countries.

Many of the workers at Wacol also come from all over the world, with immigrant backgrounds spanning from Asia to Africa, the Middle East and the South Pacific.

Members of the campaign team handed out more than 100 copies of WSWs reports and statements on the overwhelming rejection by the workers at the New River Valley Plant in Dublin, Virginia of the wage- and conditions-cutting contract proposed by the United Auto Workers union and Volvo management. The leaflets included the June 7 Perspective: “Volvo Truck workers in Virginia return to the picket lines: A turning point in the US and global class struggle.”

Workers expressed appreciation for being informed by the WSWs about the struggle in North America, saying they had heard nothing about it from the trade union covering the Wacol plant, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU).

Workers pulled over in their cars or stopped as they walked out to find out about the strike and make brief statements of support. Their comments were made anonymously, or they used modified names, due to concerns about victimisation by the company.

Samuel, who has worked at the plant for almost 30 years, held up a copy of the WSWs statement, “Break the isolation of the strike of the Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia!” He said: “We should support the Virginia workers. I’ve heard they are on McDonalds wages.”

Condemning the AMWU’s silence on the strike, Samuel commented: “The Australian unions are just for Australia. But it’s a domino effect. What happens in other plants will happen here.”

He added: “We never hear anything until it’s too late. I have been through strikes, redundancies and negotiations, and it’s always the same. Now we have rumours here that the company wants to force us to take a production holiday, because of slowing production, but we have been told nothing about it... We get kept in the dark.”

Susan, a young female worker, gave the most enthusiastic response to being told of the strike in Virginia. “Yee ha!” she exclaimed. “Definitely, yes, we should support them! We are facing the same kinds of things they are. There are problems here, like lack of parts and lack of organisation.”

Clayton, who has worked at the Wacol plant for 10 years, said: “We should support the Virginia strikers. We definitely need to be together.” Asked about the formation of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee by the Virginia workers to fight the sellouts by the UAW, he said: “That sounds good.”

Other workers made statements of support for the Virginia strikers. A Maori worker, originally from New Zealand, said: “Definitely, we have to support them. What’s happening there is going to affect us, sooner or later. Production is slow here now because of a lack of parts. If it comes to it, we should have action by all the Volvo workers worldwide.”

One worker commented: “We’re all part of the same company aren’t we?” This was a common sentiment. “Yes, we have to stand together,” another said. “We can’t fight the company in one plant.”

Likewise, a worker from a Pacific Islander background said: “We’re all part of the same company, so we have to stand as one. The union is trying to keep it quiet.”

Numbers of the workers were recently hired casuals, including one young assembler, who said he has to serve three months’ probation.

Like the UAW, the AMWU has done nothing to inform other Volvo workers internationally about the strike, let alone organise support action. As of last night, there is no mention of the Volvo dispute on the AMWU web site or Facebook page.

The AMWU has a history of striking mutually profitable deals with Volvo and two other truck manufacturers: Kenworth and Scania. In a September 2015 media release, the union stated: “The AMWU has continued to power along in the heavy vehicle industry, with new union-negotiated agreements at Kenworth and Volvo an encouraging sign of a smooth road ahead.” The union said the enterprise agreements, plus ones at Scania, contributed to “the bright future of truck manufacture, sales and maintenance in Australia.”

While suppressing news about the strike in Virginia, the AMWU recently publicised on Facebook a visit last month by its officials to the Wacol plant, as part of the union’s nationalist campaign to “Support Aussie Made!” The post declared: “Australian made means Australian jobs, and buying local supports the hundreds of AMWU Members working at Volvo!”

This nationalism, a hallmark of the trade unions for decades, subordinates the interests of workers to the profit-making requirements of companies with Australian-based operations, and splits them from their fellow workers internationally. In reality, the interests of workers, including for decent-paying and secure jobs, can be realised only through a unified global struggle against transnational corporations like Volvo.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) is holding an online forum this Saturday June 26 at 4 p.m. to discuss the way forward for Volvo workers and the striking workers at the General Mills food manufacturing plant in western Sydney. To register for the event, please contact the SEP at sepbris@gmail.com



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