

Strike of 2,900 Virginia workers leads to shift reductions at Maryland Mack-Volvo plant

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As the strike of nearly 3,000 Virginia Volvo Truck workers at the New River Valley plant enters its third week, the work stoppage has begun to affect other operations within the giant truck manufacturer's supply chain.

On Monday, a spokesperson with the Volvo Group admitted to the industry publication *Freightwaves* that shift reductions were occurring at the Volvo-Mack Truck engine and transmission plant located outside of Hagerstown, Maryland. "The strike has affected Hagerstown, which has reduced the number of shifts for some operations, last week and this week," stated John Mies, a spokesperson for the company.

While the official was not specific as to how many workers have been impacted by the reductions, Volvo-Mack workers who have reached out to the *World Socialist Web Site* have stated that shifts related to the engine line have been laid off.

Workers told the WSWs that a notice of a temporary layoff "offering" was issued for the Mack Track Hagerstown plant, which would last through much of July. The notice said, "Temporary Layoff is being offered to employees per their Election Forms on file. The TLO duration is expected to be July 5-July 23."

Evading the question of whether the production slowdown was being initiated by the strike, the company notice referred obliquely to the speedup that will be demanded of workers to fulfill truck order later this year. "This step is being taken because we're faced with production interruptions caused by a number of variables and will be onboarding 50+ transitional workers on June 28 to prepare us for our planned increase in rates to meet the strong industry demand."

According to Volvo's website, the 1.5-million-square-foot location is involved in the manufacturing of Volvo D11 and D13 engines as well as I-Shift automated

manual transmissions. It employs more than 1,700 workers. The location has been in operation since 1961. Engines and transmissions are shipped to the NRV plant, where all of the company's North American Volvo-branded trucks US are built, and also to the Macungie, Pennsylvania, plant, near Allentown, where Mack-branded trucks are assembled. Workers at the NRV plant paint cabs for both the Volvo- and Mack-branded trucks.

Layoffs have also hit the Allentown assembly plant. "This week second shift production is off and next week first is off," a worker there told the WSWs. Although there is widespread support for joint action, the United Auto Workers (UAW) is forcing workers to remain on the job. "We all need to stick together and should be under one contract," he said, adding that workers at his plant hope the striking NRV workers "won't give in."

The *Freightwaves* statement is the first public admission that the strike is having an impact on the company's operations. The article also notes that "the antipathy that local members have for their bargainers may be more intense than for the company. ..." Indeed, over the last five weeks, Volvo workers have rejected two pro-company contracts pushed by the UAW by votes of 90–91 percent.

In opposition to the UAW, the 2,900 Volvo workers at the NRV Virginia facility have held fast to their demands for higher pay and better benefits and opposition to the two-tier wage system and the introduction of a 10-hour work schedule.

As the strike continues, the UAW's strategy to keep the strike as isolated as possible grows ever more apparent. The UAW used the same method to divide Volvo workers during the strike by 3,500 Volvo-Mack workers in Maryland, Pennsylvania and other states in

2019.

Since the contract's ratification, which was done before workers could see the full language of the agreement, the number of temporary part-time workers, called "transitional workers," has expanded immensely at the Hagerstown plant and elsewhere in the Volvo-Mack supply chain.

Significantly, the 2019 strike at Volvo-Mack created a similar parts shortage at NRV, though the UAW did nothing then to unify the workers on strike with those affected. Now that the shoe is on the other foot, the UAW is performing the same routine in reverse.

The UAW used threats and intimidation to push through the last contract, including threats that the plant would close unless workers accept more givebacks, a Hagerstown worker told the WSWS. "It's not hard to see the agenda, the company is slowly phasing out the union wage for temporary workers and advancing the least senior people who will not stand against anything the company does! We have taken so many concessions in the years to make sure Volvo is profitable that it has become a non-stop waterfall of losses to the workforce!"

UAW Secretary-Treasurer Ray Curry, who sold out the 2019 strike and is leading negotiations at Volvo Trucks, and the rest of the UAW International leadership "have undermined the rights and abilities of the union worker for their ill-gotten gain," the Hagerstown worker told the WSWS.

With negotiations set to resume between the UAW and Volvo on Wednesday, the UAW is continuing to isolate the strikers in Virginia and is imposing a news blackout to conceal any information about the strike among hundreds of thousands of auto and auto parts workers. At the same time, the UAW, which sits on a \$790 million strike fund, is trying to starve workers into submission with poverty-level strike benefits of \$275 a week.

On June 14, the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee has issued an open letter challenging the UAW to say what its negotiating demands are, why workers are only being paid \$275 a week, and what the UAW's strategy to win the strike is. "You claim to be our representatives, yet we see that on every front your actions are undermining our strike"—pointing to the lack of any information on the UAW's web site or social media outlets and the fact that most workers in

the auto plants are not even aware of the strike.

While the UAW plans to keep workers "isolated and starved on the picket lines until we accept what we have already rejected," the committee declares, "We are not going to sit by and let this happen! We are not going to let Volvo, with your collaboration, try to teach us a lesson and punish us for voting down your contracts twice."

The committee demands the full mobilization of UAW members to support the strike, beginning with the shutdown of the Volvo-Mack plants, and appeals for international solidarity. In addition, it calls for full income support from the UAW strike fund and open negotiations overseen by rank-and-file workers. The letter 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 stand taken by the Volvo workers has generated widespread support from workers all over the world who have learned about the strike and the rank-and-file committee's open letter through the WSWS. "I admire their courage and their stand," said a Kansas City Ford worker. "I talked to one co-worker about the strike and sent the article to him, and he called me back and asked me questions because he said he never heard about it. When we get the UAW newspapers they don't report on the strike.

"The negotiations should not be secret. It shouldn't take the UAW too long to answer the questions if they're actually working for the workers, but we'll see what happens. I'm pulling for the workers. I think this needs to be worldwide, with all the Volvo workers in all the plants in different countries called out, like the letter said."



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