

Educators across the US West Coast call for unified struggle with striking Volvo workers

**West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees
22 June 2021**

The West Coast Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees, comprised of educators and parents in California, Washington and Oregon, hails the strike of nearly 3,000 workers at the Volvo plant in Dublin, Virginia. All teachers and school staff must rally in defense of the Volvo workers' struggle and work to broaden it as widely as possible.

This is the second strike this year of the Virginia Volvo workers, who have refused to back down in the face of rotten contracts that the company and the United Auto Workers (UAW) have attempted to foist upon them.

The struggle at Volvo is part of a growing counteroffensive by the working class, which has endured decades of wage and benefit cuts and rising costs of living.

Capitalist governments throughout the world, and especially in the United States, have made clear that it is not the lives of workers that matter, but the astronomical fortunes of the ultra-wealthy. Workers, for their part, are told they must sacrifice themselves to provide figures like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, already billionaires dozens of times over, with billions more. Volvo CEO Martin Lundstedt receives a total annual salary of \$51.6 million, more than 800 times larger than even the most senior production line worker.

The enrichment of these oligarchs takes place as Volvo workers often cannot afford rent, food, health care and other basic necessities. In fact, the conditions facing Volvo workers are common to all other sections of the working class.

Such conditions include yearly salary "increases," which either do not exist or are well below the rate of inflation, leading to a real loss of spending power year after year; cuts to pensions, health care and other benefits; and inadequate health and safety protocols,

leading to a proliferation of sickness and death.

When the pandemic began to explode in early 2020, the unions and the automakers insisted that workers remain crowded together on the assembly line while production continued as normal. It was only through independent work stoppages by the workers that the automakers were forced to back down. Similarly, mass opposition among teachers forced school closures and prevented what could have been even more catastrophic surges of COVID-19 during the last two school years.

Now, the capitalist elites are trying to make up for lost time. This involves not only bringing employees back into unsafe workplaces but also driving down workers' living standards. Furthermore, the US ruling elite is actively making plans to go to war against China or Russia, two nuclear armed powers, in an attempt to reverse its economic decline.

We have no choice but to fight back against these homicidal policies.

Here on the West Coast, teachers were pushed back into unsafe classrooms despite the fact that dangerous strains of the coronavirus continued to circulate among the population and while cases and deaths skyrocketed globally.

At least 1,000 active and retired teachers have died of COVID-19 in the US alone. The reported deaths include educators as young as 26 years old and include teachers of every race and ethnicity.

The key prop for the back-to-school drive was the teachers unions, who told their members they had no choice but to go back into classrooms while the coronavirus ran rampant.

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, with an annual salary of roughly \$500,000, has ruthlessly spearheaded this effort on behalf of the Biden administration. Weingarten has

made clear that this policy will continue and intensify into the next school year, recently tweeting: “America’s teachers and staff are ‘all in’ for in-person learning this fall.”

The murderous school reopening drive follows the betrayals of the 2018-19 teacher strikes which took place across the country. Like the UAW, the teachers unions at the time kept workers completely in the dark about negotiations. In the case of strikes in Los Angeles, Oakland and other cities, teachers were provided no strike pay while they spent days fighting on the picket line. The teachers were given little to no time to review the contracts before voting, while the contracts themselves met none of the teachers’ demands for increased staffing, nurses, building repairs, lower class sizes or pay and benefits.

The necessary response of teachers and workers alike could not be clearer. Independent rank-and-file committees must be built so that workers can take the struggle into their own hands. Only through the building of such committees can workers break through the isolation imposed on them by the unions while raising the demands for what they actually need, not what the unions and the companies falsely tell workers they can afford.

In fact, it was the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee that released contract details to members in advance of the vote, leading to a massive repudiation of the sellout agreement. After the UAW had shut down the previous strike in April after only two weeks, the workers courageously voted down the second repackaged contract, which contained almost exactly the same miserable provisions of the first, with 91 percent voting against the deal and only 9 percent in favor.

The Volvo truck workers join Warrior Met coal miners on the picket line in Alabama, steel workers at Allegheny Technologies in Pennsylvania, nurses in Massachusetts, along with numerous other workers conducting strikes across the US and internationally.

In each case, workers are not only confronting the hostility of the companies, but the unions themselves, which do everything to wear down and isolate strike actions.

Out of the UAW’s total strike fund of nearly \$800 million, striking Volvo workers were only promised strike pay of \$275 a week, and that only after two

weeks spent on the picket lines. When it comes time for UAW executives to take lavish vacations, buy luxury items or other perks, no expense is spared. When workers need financial support to conduct their struggles, there is suddenly no money available.

The ruling elite is immensely fearful of the potential of the Volvo strike to ignite mass opposition, which could put an end to the relative class peace it has enjoyed at the expense of steadily declining living standards for the working class over the past several decades.

This is precisely why the mass media and even the UAW itself has said nothing about the Volvo workers strike. This stands in marked contrast to the endless media support of the unionization drive by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) at the Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, which even received the fulsome support of the Biden administration. This is precisely because, unlike the Volvo strike, a successful unionization drive by the RWDSU union presented no threat whatsoever to corporate profits and shareholders.

In order to break through the blackout imposed on Volvo workers by the mass media, the unions and their pseudo-left appendages, we will do everything in our power to bring the Volvo workers struggle to the attention of workers across the US and internationally.

The ruling elite is wasting no time in speeding up its attacks on workers. Workers, in turn, must waste no time in building independent networks of rank-and-file committees to fight back. We salute the Volvo strikers and their leadership in the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, who have taken some of the most important first steps in this critical struggle.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact