

Support builds among workers across the US for call to establish solidarity committees to aid Volvo Trucks strike

Tom Hall
24 June 2021

Campaigners from the *World Socialist Web Site* have encountered broad support among workers across the United States for its call to form a network of rank-and-file solidarity committees in support of the strike by nearly 3,000 Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia.

A worker at the Mack Trucks assembly plant in Macungie, Pennsylvania, told the WSWS, “I think it’s a great idea. ... I totally support the workers in Dublin. I believe it’s time for the companies to stop taking from the workers and give them back some of the profits that they’re making from us.”

Pointing to the growing divergence between the incomes and interests of trade union executives and rank-and-file workers, he noted, “Just because their pockets get filled, does it mean ours do?”

Manufacturing at Mack Trucks, a subsidiary of Volvo, is tightly bound together with the New River Valley (NRV) plant in Virginia where workers are striking. Production at several Mack sites is being significantly impacted by the strike, similar to how the NRV plant was forced to idle during the Mack Trucks strike in 2019. However, the United Auto Workers (UAW) keeps workers at the two subsidiaries on separate contracts with different expiration dates in order to isolate them from each other.

The strike at Volvo’s New River Valley plant, the second this year, emerged out of a rebellion by workers against the pro-corporate UAW. Workers have twice overwhelmingly voted down UAW-backed contracts containing substantial givebacks, defying intimidation from UAW national, regional and local officials, including Secretary-Treasurer Ray Curry, head of the Heavy Trucks Department.

Workers at the NRV plant have formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC) to fight the combined efforts of the company and the UAW to impose concessions in pay, health care, and working conditions, and the committee played the leading role in organizing the opposition to the two sellout agreements. The VWRFC issued a powerful open letter last week calling for the UAW to reveal its plan for the strike and demanding substantial improvements to wages, benefits and working conditions.

From the start, the UAW has been seeking to isolate the struggle, publishing nothing on its national website or Facebook page on the walkout, while keeping striking workers in the dark about what it is supposedly “negotiating” with Volvo that is different from its previous two agreements. Talks between the UAW and Volvo nominally resumed on Wednesday, but the union has said nothing about the content of its discussions with the company.

The UAW’s silence on the strike has gone in tandem with a near-total information blackout by the national media. Most workers, including UAW members, who spoke with the WSWS had either previously been unaware that the strike was taking place or had learned of it recently only

through the WSWS.

Workers spoke with particular enthusiasm about the WSWS’s proposal that rank-and-file solidarity committees demand sharp increases in pay from the union’s \$780 million strike fund. The UAW is currently giving out only \$275 per week, less than the minimum wage, while it continues to pay hundreds of bureaucrats at the misnamed Solidarity House headquarters their bloated salaries, averaging in the thousands of dollars a week.

“Honestly, I think the most important thing is getting the union to pay them full pay,” another worker from Mack Trucks in Macungie said. “They have Volvo where they want them. They should not have to be forced to fight their own union as well. They paid their dues in, trusting the UAW for strength in return in times of need. This is their time of need, and they are failed by the union they paid to protect them.”

The worker said they were interested in the idea of a solidarity committee at the plant, noting, “I think everyone needs to be moving in the same direction, so it makes sense to me.”

There has also been broad support from readers of the *Autoworker Newsletter* from across the US auto industry. One worker from Ford’s Louisville Assembly Plant in Kentucky said, “I’ll post this [statement] on Facebook. You’re doing more for members than the UAW nationally and the locals. Nothing has changed since they put [former UAW Presidents Gary Jones and Dennis Williams] in prison. ...”

Referring to the WSWS’s analyses of the UAW’s tax returns, which reveal multimillion-dollar expenditures on UAW officials, including hundreds who make six-figure salaries, he said, “I’ve seen your articles about the LM-2 reports. They can’t lie about it. Keep up the good work.”

Members of the Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee at the Columbus, Indiana, auto parts plant—which produces catalytic converters and exhaust systems for Volvo trucks—have been circulating articles about the strike at their factory. A supporter of the committee told the WSWS Wednesday evening that attempts by the media and the unions to isolate the strikers are already breaking down, and support for the strike is beginning to build.

“The Volvo strikers are running into the same problems that we all confront when it comes to the unions, auto workers, teachers, miners, it doesn’t matter,” he said. “The union is doing nothing for its constituents. It does for the company. And that has to stop. That little bit of strike pay just goes to show what kind of crooks are running the unions.

“The union has almost \$800 million in its strike fund. The strikers should get their full pay. They paid into that union, and now the union wants to screw them. That is bull!

“People here are starting to hear about the strike at Volvo and they’re all for it,” he continued. “We are getting to the same place at Gladstone, working more hours and people are not getting paid what they should be

getting. These companies are going to keep pushing the concessions. That's why we need to stand together in solidarity all across the nation."

On Thursday, supporters of the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* went to the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) in suburban Detroit to distribute copies of the statement calling for rank-and-file solidarity committees.

The Stellantis workers were anxious to hear about the strike and thanked the WSWS for informing them. Most workers knew nothing about it due to the news blackout by the UAW and the corporate news media. After distributing scores of leaflets at the plant gates, guards hired by Stellantis from Securitas told the campaigners they had to leave the area, and later called the police on them, even though they were standing on a public sidewalk.

Despite the company attempts at intimidation, the WSWS supporters continued to distribute the statement, and workers driving their cars in and out of the plant enthusiastically took copies of it. One worker replied, "Hell yes, I support them," as she took the leaflet. Asked how she learned about the strike, she said, "I read it on the *World Socialist Web Site*."

Another worker took the leaflet and asked, "Why were the cops out here?" The campaigner replied, "Stellantis called them because they don't want workers to read about this strike." When he added, "The UAW doesn't want you to know about it either," the worker asked, "Why not?" The campaigner said, "Because the Volvo workers voted down two UAW-backed contracts by 90 percent and they don't want Stellantis workers to rebel against the UAW too." "Oh, I understand," the worker replied.

Stellantis was formed by the merger of the Italian-American company Fiat Chrysler and the French PSA Group. Former UAW Vice President General Holiefield signed a series of concessions with Fiat Chrysler in 2007, 2009 and 2011, which introduced the two-tier wage system, cut the pay of new hires in half, and established the 10-hour "Alternative Work Schedule," all but eliminating the eight-hour day. As head of the UAW Heavy Truck Department, Holiefield also sold out the two-month strike by Volvo Trucks workers in 2008 and signed Volvo Trucks deals establishing and expanding the multi-tier wage system there in 2008 and 2011.

It was later revealed that Holiefield and his wife were paid more than \$1.2 million in bribes by Fiat Chrysler executives in exchange for signing the pro-company contracts. Holiefield died in 2015 before he could be convicted for his crimes.

"These were the same crooks?" asked one Stellantis worker, when a campaigner explained about Holiefield negotiating the contracts at Fiat Chrysler and Volvo. Told that the Volvo Trucks workers were fighting to get rid of the two-tier wage system and prevent the establishment of a 10-hour workday, the young worker said, "That's great. We all should be supporting them."

Another SHAP worker who spoke to the WSWS said an increase in strike pay is "more than fair." He said, "What is \$275 when they spend millions defending incarcerated former UAW presidents who lied, and they still defend them? The strikers should get \$900 a week. That's what the strike fund is for."

He drew parallels between conditions at Volvo and his plant. "Right now at SHAP our shifts are overlapping," he said, since the company ended staggered shifts and other safety measures on Monday. "While we're there till 9:30, C shift comes on the line at 9:30. The parking lot is a mess. We're still wearing masks and self-certifying, but no temperature checks, no cleaning, they cut all that out to get extra 30 minutes of trucks, so the line never stops now." SHAP was the site of a massive outbreak of COVID-19 earlier in the year, with more than 10 percent of the plant's workforce of more than 7,000 at one point quarantining or on sick leave.

He continued, "We're still working three Saturdays a month [in forced overtime]. People are upset because they are putting us at risk by not

checking temperatures and not cleaning. We're in close quarters now more than ever, just so they can get more trucks."

Workers in other industries also sent in statements of support.

A leading member of the Baltimore Amazon Workers Rank and File Safety Committee called for the formation of new workers' organizations in auto and other industries. "The UAW could care less about its members. It has an agenda. What's the point of joining a trade union? From what I hear from workers in other industries, and from looking at the history of what workers could get then versus now, why would I want to give them my money and cross my fingers that they'll represent me properly? You can't trust them."

The Baltimore Amazon committee has released a statement endorsing the Volvo workers' struggle and calling on Volvo and Mack Trucks workers "to reach out to the *World Socialist Web Site* and fight to break the wall of silence imposed on you by the UAW." The committee's statement declares: "If corporate giants like Amazon are allowed to intervene in this struggle to push workers' living standards down, then it is workers' duty to intervene in their own interests to raise them."

A registered nurse in California also wrote to the WSWS about the strike, saying, "I support the courageous Volvo workers' fight against the greedy multinational Volvo corporation and the corrupt United Auto Workers (UAW). These are the same issues faced by nurses such as myself from greedy hospital conglomerates and nurse unions. The nurse union bureaucrats work in tandem with hospital administrators to tamp down on nurse opposition. They would have secret meetings behind nurses' backs to discuss concessions such as wages, benefits, employee/union rights, working conditions and safe patient care policies."

She added, "It is time that the working class unite in the United States and abroad to fight the murderous herd immunity policies started by the Trump administration and continued by the Biden administration. I am giving my full support to the Volvo workers and encourage them to stand strong against the Volvo corporation and the corrupt UAW. I encourage all autoworkers to form rank-and-file solidarity committees to break the isolation of the Volvo workers strike and come out to support their fellow brothers and sisters on the picket line."

We urge Mack Trucks workers, autoworkers and other workers to sign up today to learn more about joining or forming a rank-and-file solidarity committee to support the Volvo Trucks strike.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact