

Entering fourth week, Volvo Trucks strike faces urgent need to break out of isolation

Marcus Day
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As the strike by nearly 3,000 Volvo Trucks workers in southwestern Virginia enters its fourth week, it is increasingly apparent that workers are locked in battle against merciless, cutthroat opponents.

The reserve forces of the enemy must not be underestimated: As long as the strike remains confined to just the New River Valley plant, the company will hold out and seek every means to break the will and unity of workers. Therefore, the most urgent task is to end the isolation of the strike and mobilize reinforcements of workers from Volvo's other operations, including Mack Trucks, and throughout the auto industry.

The issues facing Volvo workers confront the entire working class, making it critical that workers act to ensure a successful outcome to the struggle. Rank-and-file solidarity committees must be formed to aid the strike, through protests, slowdowns, and other solidarity actions, including the shutdown of the auto and truck manufacturing industries.

Volvo workers have shown they are absolutely determined to reverse the decades-long erosion in their living and working conditions. They see no reason to accept higher health care costs, the continuation of the hated multi-tier wage and benefit system, the ending of the eight-hour day, and other concessions while the company has been making massive profits throughout the pandemic and handing out billions in dividends to its investors.

The statements and open letters of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which has emerged as the incipient leadership of the struggle at Volvo, have articulated these widely held sentiments and unified workers' opposition to the company's demands, galvanizing the two overwhelming contract rejections.

Volvo, for its part, has made clear its refusal to back down. Since the beginning of the second strike this year on June 7, it has pursued every measure to break it, no

matter how harsh, including immediately cancelling workers' health care coverage and other insurance, sending out termination notices, calling the police on picketers, and bringing in scabs to maintain operations.

However, the strikers are up against not just Volvo Group, an international corporate giant with considerable resources and experience, as well as powerful financial and political allies. Workers are also fighting the United Auto Workers union, which has worked to secure the company's demands from the beginning of the struggle over this year's contract, and which is currently doing everything it can to isolate and sabotage the strike.

It is now undeniable that the UAW is deliberately keeping its hundreds of thousands of members utterly in the dark about the walkout, posting nothing about it on its national web site or Facebook page or issuing any statements over the past three weeks.

At the same time, the UAW has been starving workers on just \$275 a week from its nearly \$800 million strike fund, even as it continues to hand out thousands a week on average in bloated salaries to hundreds of bureaucrats at its misnamed "Solidarity House" headquarters. Outrageously, Local 2069 announced on Friday that strike checks would not be available until Monday, two days later than what it had earlier told workers would be the normal pickup day.

The UAW has told striking Volvo workers nothing about what it is discussing with the company after talks over a third contract officially restarted last week, nor what terms it is demanding that are any different from the two agreements workers already overwhelmingly rejected.

Facts must be faced soberly: The UAW is silent on its closed-door "negotiations" with the company because they are not negotiating anything. Rather, they are engaged in strategy sessions with their corporate partners over the best way to break the resistance of the rank and

file and push the company's demands through.

The UAW bureaucracy is isolating the strike to just the Volvo New River Valley plant and seeking to keep it secret from workers throughout the auto industry because it sees the expansion of the struggle as the chief threat both to the company's bottom line and its own interests, which have become completely tied up with corporate profit-making.

The UAW has been joined in its conspiracy of silence by both the US corporate press, which has blacked out the strike, as well organizations which present themselves as "left" or even "socialist," such as the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and *Jacobin* magazine, one of the DSA's primary media outlets.

To date, *Jacobin* and the other publications of the DSA have published *nothing* about the struggle at Volvo. Their complete silence on Volvo contrasts sharply with their wall-to-wall coverage of the drive to unionize workers at Amazon's Bessemer, Alabama, plant, which was backed by the Biden administration, the Democratic Party, and even sections of the Republican Party.

If the DSA has remained silent about the Volvo strike, it is because they are instinctively hostile to any step taken by workers independently of the trade union bureaucracy, in which DSA members themselves occupy increasingly leading positions.

Struggles such as the one at Volvo, which has erupted into open conflict with the union apparatus, are feared like the plague by the upper-middle-class layers who control the UAW and the AFL-CIO, as well as the DSA. They are worried that the Volvo strike could trigger an ever-widening movement of workers for higher wages and benefits, which would threaten corporate profits and thus the considerable stock portfolios and investment accounts of the union executives and their allies.

It is not only Volvo and its union allies that have a stake in seeing workers' demands suppressed. Volvo's major shareholders, including large investment firms such as Sweden's Industrivärden and the US's BlackRock, have hundreds of millions and even billions on the line.

However, the significance of the strike and its potential impact stretches even more widely. As a striking Volvo worker told the WSWs last week, "If we get any gains in a contract it may be the beginning of a big movement all over the world."

With the cost of basic goods spiking, there has been growing anxiety voiced in ruling circles and the financial press over a widespread push for higher wages, especially by manufacturing workers. On Friday, an article in the

New York Times' business section cited an economist who said that the "key question" for the Federal Reserve is whether rising inflation would lead to higher pay and further "raise expectations for inflation."

The implication is that a wages push threatens to erode profits, or potentially even burst the massive speculative bubbles built up by the central banks' virtually free-money handouts to the major banks and corporations.

Volvo workers are on strike to win what they need to live. But to achieve their demands, they must fight for their class interests just as consciously and unrelentingly as their adversaries.

The strike has elicited the intense sympathy of workers who learn of it, whether they live in Macungie, Pennsylvania, Silao, Mexico, or Brisbane, Australia, because workers everywhere face stagnating wages, rising costs, crumbling benefits, and the treachery of the trade unions.

This sympathy must now be mobilized into active support and assistance.

The immense potential power of the working class, which can only be realized through its collective action and organization, must be brought to bear in order to end the isolation of the Volvo strike. It is crucial that autoworkers, and Mack Trucks workers in particular, come to the aid of their brothers and sisters.

The WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* is calling for workers to form solidarity committees to 1) demand that striking Volvo workers receive full income out of the UAW's \$790 million strike fund, which comes from workers' dues; 2) break the news blackout on the strike by circulating information at every plant; 3) take measures to ensure Volvo cannot continue operations during the strike, including the shutdown of Mack plants; and 4) prepare protests, slowdowns and other solidarity actions throughout the auto industry, where workers themselves are facing low pay, the end of COVID-19 safety measures, and other attacks on their jobs.

We urge Volvo and Mack Trucks workers and autoworkers to sign up today to find out more about joining the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee or forming a solidarity committee.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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