

Mack and Ford workers call for joint action to back Volvo Trucks strikers

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There is growing sentiment among Mack-Volvo workers in Pennsylvania and Maryland and auto industry workers for joint action to support their brothers and sisters now in the fourth week of their strike at Volvo Truck's New River Valley (NRV) plant in Dublin, Virginia.

Workers at the Macungie, Pennsylvania, Mack plant, who are members of United Auto Workers Local 677, are outraged because cabs painted by strikebreakers in Virginia are being shipped to their plant. The Sweden-based multinational bought Mack trucks in 2001 and assembles all its heavy-duty Mack trucks for the North American and export markets at the Macungie plant near Allentown. This includes models with sleeper cabs built by a third-party contractor and currently being painted by strikebreakers at NRV.

United Auto Workers International and Local 677 officials have opposed calls by the Mack workers for joint action against Volvo, even though parts shortages have already led to temporary layoffs. The UAW sold out a 12-day strike by 3,600 Mack workers in 2019 and keeps Volvo workers at NRV and Mack Council workers in Pennsylvania, Maryland and other states under separate agreements with different expiration dates. This enables Volvo to whipsaw workers against each other, shifting production between the facilities based on wherever the UAW can lower labor costs the most.

Aware of the anger over handling scab parts and growing sentiment for collective action in solidarity with the NRV strikers, UAW 677 posted a notice Monday, which read: "As the NRV strike continues, our brothers and sisters at Local 2069 need our support." Far from calling the workers out or even calling for a ban on handling scab parts, the Local 677 officials instruct workers to donate money to striking Volvo workers during the general membership meeting Thursday at the local union hall.

While workers will no doubt gladly contribute, even though they are facing the loss of income due to temporary layoffs, it is the UAW which is fully responsible for the precarious economic situation facing striking Volvo workers. Even though the UAW sits on a strike fund worth

nearly \$800 million, it has put workers on starvation rations of \$275 a week in strike benefits. While strikers face destitution, the UAW's newly installed president, Ray Curry, who negotiated the two wage- and benefit-cutting deals overwhelmingly rejected by Volvo workers, is expected to get a hefty pay bump from his current salary of \$236,600, or \$4,538 a week.

"We should not be handling any parts that come from NRV," a Macungie worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "That would really screw Volvo. Right now, Mack workers are thinking, 'Should I stick with my brothers at NRV and face the consequences from the bosses or do I just wait and see what is going to happen?'"

"The Macungie plant is working this week and off next week. Hagerstown is going to be down from July 5 to 23. There are at least 1,700 Mack trucks in the float, which are incomplete because of the lack of microchips and the impact of the strike. If all the Mack workers acted together with the NRV workers, Volvo would be screwed. Right now, NRV is on strike, but Macungie and Hagerstown are still making the company money. If we weren't running it would really hit the shareholders where it hurts.

"The UAW is not telling us anything. During the strike in 2019, our local union didn't give us any information until they got a tentative agreement. We should have stayed out longer than two weeks and stayed out along with the GM workers. The UAW added a signing bonus and a little money to get the contract through but in the end, we lost much more.

"We thought with the exposure of the corruption scheme that the executive board would have to make some changes. But now they've got Curry in charge, the same guy who sold out our strike in 2019. We've given up so much as workers. It's time for all of us, Volvo, Mack, GM, Ford, Chrysler, to stick together. We have to get the information out and start rank-and-file committees in Allentown, Hagerstown and all the facilities in the Mack Council, just like the NRV workers did."

In his statement accepting the top post at the UAW, Curry

said, “As president, I pledge to continue to build upon our commitment to a culture of transparency, reforms and checks and balances.” In fact, Curry is doing everything to conceal the deal the UAW is working out with Volvo in ongoing “negotiations” in Charlotte, North Carolina. The UAW has released no information about the talks, which are joint labor-management sessions to figure out the best strategy to beat back the resistance of Volvo workers who have already decisively rejected two pro-company contract proposals signed by Curry.

At the same time, the UAW has imposed a news blackout on the strike to prevent other autoworkers from learning about and backing this critical struggle. But unlike the countless other struggles isolated and sold out by the UAW and other unions, this battle has a different character because the Virginia workers have formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which functions as a real leadership of the workers. Earlier this month, the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued a powerful open letter to the UAW which demanded joint action, beginning with Mack-Volvo workers to shut down Volvo’s operations.

In opposition to the UAW news blackout of the strike, campaigners from the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* spoke to autoworkers in Chicago and Detroit over the weekend and distributed the statement, “Autoworkers: Form rank-and-file solidarity committees to break the isolation of the strike at Volvo Trucks!”

An autoworker in the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant (CAP) told the WSWS, “I was reading the last article on Volvo. It’s uplifting to hear the stand they have taken, but sad to hear how the UAW is only giving \$275 for support of the matter. It’s even worse to keep their strike covered up, in an attempt to keep all other plants in the dark. I believe this is needed and will hit the CAP soon. We just got to get someone to lead the charge.”

“They definitely should get more,” said Devon, another Chicago Ford worker, when he heard about the poverty strike pay of \$275 a week for Volvo workers. “Especially in a pandemic—in a pandemic when they have a couple kids and sick relatives. The strike pay is definitely not enough. What we face at Ford is pretty much the same thing. The type of work we do and the amount of stress we put on our body, we all deserve more!”

Speaking on the treachery of the UAW, Mike, another Chicago autoworker said, “There’s UAW management collecting millions in dues while everybody is still getting the same wages, and they haven’t taken a cut. I don’t think that is fair. They are still taking our union dues. It took me five weeks to get a check. The UAW isn’t anywhere to be found.”

Mike praised the Volvo workers and the autoworkers in

India who have carried out wildcat strikes against the spread of COVID-19 at Ford and other auto companies. “We got to take a stand too.”

Another autoworker, Anthony, had not heard about the strike due to the UAW blackout but gave his support once reporters discussed the issues involved. “I didn’t even know about the strike,” he said. “But I support them. I hope things turn out how they want them. They should absolutely get full income for their strike. We work hard just like everybody else. Everything needs to be equal.”

A former autoworker spoke out in support of the defense of the Volvo workers: “I was an automotive worker for 20 years before moving out of the Detroit area. I want to send a message of support and solidarity to the Volvo workers facing a challenging strike. We’re all watching you and we all support you. You may not realize it, but you’re standing up for each other, for your hometown, and for all of us right now. Don’t give up!

“I watched the steady decline of my hometown for three decades. We got eaten up as profits for the auto industry bosses. They told us if we paid for more of our health insurance, they’d keep the plants open. They told us if we gave them tax breaks, they’d keep the plants open. They told us if we slowed down our raise schedule, they’d keep the plants open. But they closed the plants anyway. They closed the Jobs Bank. They laid off thousands of engineers too. None of it was true.

“We’ve got to work together, across plants, across companies, and across industries. That’s the way we’re going to win. When we all agree that we’re not going to take any less.”

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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