

Support grows for US Volvo Trucks strike among Indian workers

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Support is growing for striking Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia among Indian workers including auto and transport workers.

The strike begun by nearly 3,000 workers June 7 after the workers rejected by 90 percent a second pro-company contract backed by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, entered the second week. The pro-corporate UAW leadership has done everything to isolate the striking workers. On the other hand, workers internationally support the call from the Volvo workers rank-and-file committee for support for their strike action.

Balakrishnan is one of 50 workers dismissed by the Motherson Automotive Technologies & Engineering (MATE), an auto-parts company operating in Sriperumbudur in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu. He has worked in the plant for 19 years. He was paid a monthly salary of 11,700 rupees (US \$ 160), the average salary paid to Motherson workers.

His family, including his wife and four children, has been thrown into dire poverty, like many other dismissed workers, by his dismissal. He has also lost his salary during the 140-day strike.

Speaking about the Volvo workers struggle, he said: “The Volvo Trucks workers strike is a historic strike that should continue uncompromisingly. I am in complete solidarity with courageous striking Volvo workers. The management and its agents, the UAW leadership must be terrified by this movement of Volvo rank-and-file workers and mounting international support for them.

“The Volvo Trucks rank-and-file committee will monitor the wheelings and dealings of the joint conspiracies of the Volvo management and the UAW leadership like a CCTV camera and keep the workers informed.

“The strike should set an example of how to rally support for workers internationally in defence of workers’ basic rights. Even if it becomes a protracted strike so be it and it should demonstrate the fighting spirit of workers. Whatever the outcome of this struggle, the coming generation of workers will appreciate and learn from this heroic strike.

“I am inspired by the struggles of the Volvo Truck workers and inclined to follow their example. Though we live far from the Volvo strikers, my heart beats like yours as workers facing a common enemy—in the form of a treacherous union and profiteering company. On the significance of the formation of rank-and-file committees of workers, I would like to discuss this experience with all my fellow workers. I am not afraid of taking up this struggle forward in the interests of the entire working class.”

He briefed the long strike he was actively involved in, and the treacherous role played by the trade union that operated in the plant—which was initially affiliated with the Maoist AICCTU. Later, it broke up and Tamil Nadu regional-based splinter group formed the LTUC.

He said it has been extremely difficult for him to feed his family without a job. After the dismissal, the MATE sent a severance package of 150,000 rupees (US\$ 2,055) to all the dismissed workers. The union insisted that dismissed workers not accept it and instead return the cheques to the union office. This action was only to contain the anger of the workers who were in the forefront of 148 days Motherson strike and to give an impression that the union is keen on taking up the dismissal case in the courts.

“A year passed by,” said Balakrishnan, “but the LTUC has not yet approached the labour courts in this regard.” He said, “But I don’t trust the union will take this up. I am in a very difficult situation to manage my

family with my children. I have been borrowing money from the people I know. I am also embarrassed to keep on asking for help from the same people, as they are also thrown into financial crisis due to the impact of the coronavirus.

“How long can we tolerate these conditions, we have been working like slaves in the companies, now the union also treating us like slaves, that we should not talk to anyone who raises critical remarks about the union.”

He appreciated the extensive coverage provided by the WSWs for the Motherson strike that the main media deliberately blacked out.

He said he knew the union leadership in the plant was frightened by the WSWs. Union officials told strikers not to talk to WSWs reporters as “they were reporting fake news about the union.”

Other workers also talked about WSWs coverage of struggles and its exposure about the company’s global network and huge profits.

One criticized the company’s refusal to compensate workers for COVID-19’s disastrous impact. He said the company should take up responsibilities for workers safety, but instead they give corona relief funds to the state chief minister’s corona relief fund. He expressed his opposition to the division of workers based on religion, language and caste and declared workers must be mobilized independently.

S. Vasan, a conductor at Tamil Nadu state transport corporation, said: “Volvo Trucks workers are involved in a major struggle against a joint conspiracy of the UAW bureaucracy and corporate management against the vast majority of rebellious workers at the Virginia Dublin plant. Their courageous struggle must be supported by the workers all over the world, as it developed into a two-front struggle, against the corporate management and pro-corporate union.

“I see the common character of the trade unions in the US and here in India. I have seen through my own experience over the last three decades the perfidious role of the unions. Most of the workers are in one or the other unions that are affiliated to various political parties. But the major political parties function like big corporations. They spend millions of rupees to contest and win elections.

“The unions linked to them operate like mini corporate unions in the state transport sector. Whenever

the rule of the party changes after elections, the state transport sector comes under the influence of the ruling party. The control of unions changes when parties come to power changes.

“Though there are several trade unions operating among state transport workers, none of them in reality work for the interests of workers. They are only concerned about preserving and improving their own privileges. The unions are concerned about collecting dues from workers. The union leaders in order to please the officers serve them as servants.

“Generally, wage hike agreements are signed every three years, however not even at the fourth or the fifth year, now we are stepping into the sixth year, still, there is no sign of any wage hike agreement being signed. What we see before our eyes, one after another every hard-won gain is being taken away by the transport corporation with the complicity of the trade unions.

“I strongly believe all the problems that we transport workers face can only be resolved through the formation of the rank-and-file committees that are independent of the unions and based on socialist policies.

A WSWs reader from Hyderabad spoke in favour of the Volvo workers strike, “The Volvo workers by coming out against the company ownership and dumping out the union siding with the management, have demonstrated courageous direct action by the workers. They are fighting courageously. They may face setbacks in the short run, but they will win. Their success will have a chain reaction across the world. I want the brave Volvo workers to win.

“The cracks within the American capitalist order are now clear to all the world. So far it is being proclaimed by capitalist intellectuals as the ideal and invincible. Even they are compelled to introspect their understanding. The hollowness of the corrupt unions is also out in the open. The only way forward is for the workers, middle class, and peasants to unite and fight the corrupt system.”



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