

Support striking Volvo workers in the United States!

An appeal to Volvo workers in Ghent (Belgium) and all European workers

Ulrich Rippert, Chairman of the Socialist Equality Party of Germany
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We encourage Volvo and other workers internationally to send a statement of support to the strikers in Dublin, Virginia using the form below.

Dear Colleagues,

Three thousand Volvo Truck workers in Dublin, Virginia, have been on strike for three weeks. The workers at the New River Valley plant are fighting for a contract that overturns the attacks on wages and workplace benefits over recent years. They urgently require your support to win their struggle against the multinational company.

If the strike remains confined to a single plant, the company will stick to its guns and use all means at its disposal to break the will and unity of the workers. It is therefore urgently necessary to break the strike out of its isolation and mobilise reinforcements: workers from other plants in the United States and internationally.

Your colleagues in the United States are not only confronted with a cut-throat company but also a trade union that does the corporation's dirty work.

The United Auto Workers (UAW) twice signed contracts that were voted down by over 90 percent of the workers. They contained increases in health care costs, the retention of the hated multitier wage and benefit system, an end to the eight-hour day and further concessions.

The UAW is now trying to starve the workers. Although the union has hoarded billions of dollars and its top officials earn hundreds of thousands of dollars each year, it is paying strike pay that does not even correspond to the minimum wage.

The union is also trying to isolate the strike. It has not

even informed its members in the US, never mind workers at Volvo Trucks in other countries, that the strike is occurring. The union is supported in this by a pro-corporate media that has totally ignored the strike, as if it were not taking place.

The company, the union, the politicians and the media are terrified that the workers' struggle in Virginia could spread like wildfire if other workers follow its example. After all, the problems faced by your American colleagues are the same faced by you and the international working class.

For years, the global auto industry has been dominated by a handful of players, who ruthlessly play off individual locations against each other to cut real wages, eliminate social benefits and increase workloads. In truck production, the largest companies are Daimler, followed by two Chinese firms, and Volvo Trucks.

These companies view the coronavirus pandemic as a welcome opportunity to intensify the assault on the working class. Despite a decline in sales, the Volvo Group paid out \$3.7 billion in dividends this year, and a one-off payment of \$2.3 billion for the sale of its Japanese subsidiary UD Trucks (formerly Nissan Diesel). This was paid for through the stepped up exploitation of the workforce.

This onslaught would not be possible if workers from all plants united. Volvo operates plants in 18 countries, with another 10 run by independent companies. The globalisation of production has given workers tremendous power and strength. They must become conscious of this strength and fight for their rights.

But the trade unions do everything in their power to prevent this. This applies not only to the UAW in the United States, but also to Germany's IG Metall, Belgium's auto trade unions and trade unions throughout Europe.

In this globally competitive struggle, the highly paid functionaries in the unions and works councils represent the interests of "their" companies and not those of the working class, which is an international class. They divide the workers and play off one location against another.

Many workers in Ghent will recall the closure of the Ford plant in 2014, which claimed 4,600 jobs and another 5,000 among parts suppliers, or the 2010 closure of the Opel plant in Antwerp. In both cases, the closure was supported by Germany's IG Metall. However, the union did not succeed in "saving" jobs in Germany. Opel, which now belongs to Stellantis, barely continues to exist.

The defence of jobs and wages requires a break from the corrupt and nationalist unions, and the building of independent action committees directly controlled by the workers themselves. In Virginia, the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee played a decisive role in organising the opposition to the UAW's sellouts.

In an open letter to the leadership of the UAW, it stressed that the workers will not accept a contract reached behind closed doors. It demanded that a representative of the workers attend and monitor each negotiating session and presented a series of minimum demands that a contract must fill. It demanded strike pay equivalent to a striker's full wages, paid for by the UAW's \$700 million strike fund, which was built up with workers' dues.

The Volvo workers strike is emerging as a symbol of the mounting rebellion by workers against corporate management and the trade unions. In Alabama, over 1,000 miners have been striking against the Warrior Met Coal company since April 1. On April 9, they voted down a five-year contract agreed to by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) by a huge majority.

It is critical to unite these struggles internationally and provide them with a unified perspective. The International Committee of the Fourth International, to which my party belongs, therefore launched the

initiative on May 1 of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

I appeal to the Volvo workers in Ghent and workers throughout Europe:

- Support the New River Valley strikers and make their struggle your own.

- Follow the coverage of the strike on the *World Socialist Web Site* and make contact with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees and the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

- Form your own rank-and-file committee to organise protests, production slowdowns, and other solidarity measures, including the shutdown of Volvo and the entire truck and auto manufacturing industry.

In solidarity,

Ulrich Rippert, chairman of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and candidate in the German federal election



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact