

UAW releases evasive “update” to striking Volvo workers, while continuing to black out struggle nationally

Marcus Day
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With the strike by 2,900 Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia nearing the end of its first month, the United Auto Workers is ramping up its efforts to work out yet another backroom, pro-company deal.

On Tuesday, UAW Secretary-Treasurer Ray Curry, who is set to become UAW president on July 1, released a letter to striking workers presented as an “update” on negotiations. Curry has been overseeing the talks with Volvo as head of the union’s Heavy Trucks Department and signed off on the two earlier tentative agreements that were angrily rejected by workers by 90 percent margins. The contracts would have raised health care costs, maintained the hated multi-tier wage and benefit system, throttled top pay increases below inflation, undermined retiree health care, and ended the eight-hour day.

In line with the UAW’s overall efforts to keep striking workers in the dark, Curry’s letter in fact contained no concrete information on what the UAW has been discussing behind closed doors with the company, while feigning sympathy for the plight of striking workers: “Together we continue to stand strong in Solidarity during this strike and we all know how difficult this is for your fellow co-workers and your families.”

Curry and the well-paid UAW apparatus are far from standing “together” and sharing any hardship with striking workers. While dispensing only \$275 a week to workers out of the union’s \$790 million strike fund, Curry and his fellow bureaucrats continue to draw their full paychecks. Curry’s pay in 2020 was \$236,600, and the average “Solidarity House” annual salary totals over \$120,000, meaning hundreds of UAW executives and staffers are taking home thousands a week while

striking workers are forced to draw down their savings or borrow money to stay afloat.

The letter continued, “I want you to know that we continue in our talks with Volvo Trucks about the key issues of concern that we are all focused on based on previous proposals. While your elected bargaining team met twice last week and are meeting again today, we have not yet made substantial progress on the key issues that together you have identified and are striking to achieve. Talks are scheduled to continue tomorrow.”

Behind the mealy-mouthed phrases, the one substantive fact is that no “substantial progress” has been made, i.e., that the company is refusing to budge on its initial demands for concessions.

The letter concludes by warning darkly about the influence of “outside groups,” which Curry claimed were seeking to “divide us on the picket line.” However, what Curry attributes to “outsiders” is in fact the real sentiments of workers at the plant, who are overwhelmingly opposed themselves to the UAW’s attempts to push through concessions on behalf of the company.

Faced with years of double-dealing by the UAW, workers at New River Valley have organized independently in the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee in order to fight for what they actually need, demanding an end to the tier system, a 25 percent raise for all workers, a cost of living escalator clause to keep pace with soaring inflation, fully funded health care for active workers and retirees, and the maintenance of the eight-hour day.

A number of striking workers reacted to Curry’s letter with anger and derision in comments posted on UAW Local 2069’s Facebook page.

One wrote, “I think I just read blah blah blah, we work for Volvo, we will do the best we can blah blah blah, and when it’s good for them we will talk.”

Another commented, “Ray Curry, if you would have stood up for us in the beginning we would not be where we [are] today. Just how much was you offered to throw us under the bus with the first two crappy contacts. From what I have read about you, you have been selling out UAW members for decades now. So put your money where your mouth is and do your job and bring back a decent contract!!!!”

Another worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “This is just a generic letter with no info. Curry is just playing the role as union president before he is sworn in. He says the company is not budging but doesn’t propose anything to fight them. He’s telling us: ‘We’re not going to do anything different. Just starve you to death on the picket line and hope everything changes.’”

“Curry says that ‘outsiders are dividing us.’ He’s worried about how the independent rank-and-file committee is getting into everybody’s ears about the union and about Curry himself. All the talk of ‘outsiders’ is a desperate attempt to keep people’s attention away from the information that is going out daily from the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee and the WSWS news articles.”

Volvo has previously sought to claim that it cannot meet workers’ demands and has no choice but to raise health care costs for active workers and retirees. In a statement which has since been taken down from Volvo’s website, New River Valley Plant General Manager Franky Marchand described health care cost-sharing increases as “unavoidable” and insisted that the company had to secure its “competitiveness.”

Of course, Volvo is demanding that such sacrifices be made solely by workers, not the company’s management or investors.

On Tuesday, Volvo Group’s shareholders voted to approve a special dividend payment of roughly \$2.3 billion based on the proceeds from the sale of one of the company’s subsidiaries, Japan-based UD Trucks. The payout to Volvo’s investors comes on top of dividends of approximately \$3.68 billion. The bulk of the dividends will go overwhelmingly to the large institutional investors, such as BlackRock, who make up the bulk of Volvo’s shareholders.

The UAW is increasingly desperate to find some means by which to get the company’s basic demands through, fearing that with each passing day the “risk” increases that the rebellion at Volvo could spread to factories throughout the country. The UAW has been blacking out all information on the Volvo strike to its hundreds of thousands of members, who themselves have suffered the consequences of decades of attacks on their jobs, pay, benefits and working conditions at the hands of the union.

However, an expansion of the struggle is what is absolutely required in order for Volvo workers to win their demands and for the endless corporate assault on the working class to finally be seriously combatted. The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* is calling for Mack Trucks workers and workers throughout the auto industry to form rank-and-file solidarity committees in order to break the information blackout on the strike and provide urgently needed support to striking Volvo workers.



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