

With support growing for Volvo Trucks strikers, UAW brings back another concessionary contract

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The United Auto Workers announced Thursday evening that it had reached a tentative agreement with Volvo Trucks just days after declaring that no substantial progress had been made in negotiations. The UAW made the announcement as support is growing for the 3,000 Volvo workers on strike at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia who have already rejected two UAW-backed labor agreements.

In a statement rushed out of the UAW International headquarters, newly installed President Ray Curry claimed that the six-year agreement contained “significant gains” for Volvo workers without releasing any details. Curry, who has headed up the negotiations, said the same thing about the two previous contract proposals, which workers rejected by nine-to-one margins.

Fearing a rebellion by workers if UAW executives tried to shut down the current strike before a ratification vote—like Curry did during the previous 12-day strike that ended abruptly on April 30—the UAW announced that workers would remain on strike until they voted on the deal. The ratification vote has reportedly been scheduled for next Friday, July 9.

The two previous UAW-backed deals were decisively rejected by workers because they contained negligible raises that would lead to a cut in real wages due to inflation, sharp increases in out-of-pocket medical costs for current and retired workers, and a new 10-hour workday. The rejected contracts also retained the two-tier system, which condemns newer “competitive workers” to substandard pay and benefits and gives Volvo management an extra incentive to rid the factory of more senior, higher paid “core” workers.

Despite Curry’s claims that the new deal “reflects

significant gains from the prior two tentative agreements,” what information has emerged shows it differs little from the previous two contracts. Starting pay for workers building Volvo’s heavy-duty highway trucks, which sell for \$170,000 and more, would be \$19.23 an hour. It will take six years for a worker to reach the top pay of \$30.92.

“It looks like a seven-tier system now,” one worker told the WSWS as details of the new six-year deal began to leak out Thursday night. “Looks like a fluffed-up version of the original—like lipstick on a pig,” he added.

Volvo Group, which just handed over \$2.3 billion in dividend payments to its wealthy investors, has not budged from its drive to shift medical expenses onto the backs of workers. According to photos of the deal released by Volvo workers on social media, deductibles for in-network medical costs would rise from \$200 to \$350 for single coverage and from \$400 to \$700 for a family. Coinsurance would rise from 10 percent to 15 percent, and maximum out-of-pocket costs from \$750 to \$1,000 for individual coverage and \$1,500 to \$2,000 for family coverage. The higher costs would become effective January 1, 2022.

“It’s 85/15 insurance and higher OOP [Out-of-Pocket] over the contract,” another striking worker told the WSWS. “Prior to that was 90/10 on insurance.”

The nearly four-week strike at Volvo’s largest truckmaking facility in the world and the only source for the North American market has had an impact on production. The strike has already led to temporary layoffs at the company’s Mack Trucks assembly plants in Macungie, Pennsylvania and Hagerstown, Maryland due to parts shortages.

However, an even greater concern for both Volvo and the UAW is that striking workers are beginning to break through the UAW's efforts to isolate their struggle and starve them into submission.

On Thursday, workers at Volvo's Mack Truck assembly plant in Macungie distributed an open letter from the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee urging workers to refuse to handle parts produced by strikebreakers at the Virginia plant and to join them in common action. Several workers reportedly challenged UAW Local 677 officials over the miserable \$275 a week strike pay the workers are receiving and the union's news blackout of the strike.

The UAW fears that workers, if informed, will back the striking Volvo workers and form their own rank-and-file committees to overturn decades of UAW-backed concessions. On Wednesday, autoworkers at Stellantis' Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit enthusiastically supported the striking workers during a campaign by supporters of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

In the more than three weeks of the strike, the UAW International has not posted a single article on its website or Facebook page. The first notice on the strike was the article posted Thursday night with a banner headline declaring: "Striking Volvo Truck Workers In Dublin Virginia Reach A Tentative Agreement With Major Gains."

The rank-and-file committee is independent of the pro-corporate UAW, so that workers can organize their own struggle.

Curry and the rest of the high-paid corporate stooges in the UAW are terrified that the militancy and determination of the Volvo workers will become contagious.

Conditions at the auto plants in Detroit and other industrial cities are reaching a boiling point after workers have suffered from countless deaths and infections during the pandemic. The corporations have pumped out billions in profits through mandatory six- and seven-day workweeks, 10- and 12-hour days and the brutal exploitation of temporary part-time workers. Earlier this week, the UAW agreed to lift mask mandates in the factories so that companies can extract an extra two hours of production.

In Curry's statement on the deal, he repeatedly refers to the "elected bargaining committee" that negotiated

the Volvo deal. This is aimed at countering the growing influence of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which has emerged as the real voice and leadership of the striking workers and has fought to unite all autoworkers in a common struggle.

One member of the committee told the *WSWS*, "The UAW higher-ups are in it for themselves, not us. The workers at Mack have been kept in the dark, just like us. But we are fed up and are beginning to spread our independent rank-and-file committees. If we get these committees into different plants and get workers talking to each other, we can get rid of the corrupt UAW officials. Curry talks about being 'transparent,' but there's only been two releases on the negotiations in four weeks and they said nothing, just propaganda.

"On the picket line we were figuring they would try to come up with something right before the weekend, maybe to celebrate Curry's ascension to power. We need at least a week to scrutinize the entire contract and have town hall meetings to discuss it. This deal is so far away from what we need, and we're going to vote it down again. If you pay a trial lawyer to represent you and he won't, then you fire him. That's what we need to do with the UAW."

Another member of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee said, "Workers will fight the union tooth and nail to get the whole document, not just the 'highlights.' They want us to ratify it first so they can 'deliberate' other issues afterwards.

"It is great that the Macungie and the Hagerstown workers want to support us. They should build their own rank-and-file committees. If that doesn't happen, Volvo and the UAW will get their way, and it would be really bad for all of us. If everybody should stop working, that would really hurt Volvo."



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