

Alabama educators join the growing international support for striking Volvo workers

Alabama Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
4 July 2021

The Alabama Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee extends its full solidarity to the 3,000 workers at the New River Valley Volvo plant in Dublin, Virginia who have now been on strike for one month. After overwhelmingly defeating two concessionary contracts, the workers are already exposing a new tentative agreement pushed by the UAW for making further inroads on health care and the multi-tiered payroll schemes for which the union has become notorious. As one Volvo worker commented, “Looks like a fluffed-up version of the original—like lipstick on a pig.”

Workers have found that the key to their struggle is the newly formed Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee. This committee has put forward demands based on what workers need, not what the multinational auto corporation Volvo Group and the UAW attempt to dictate. The committee has exposed the duplicity and betrayals of the pro-corporate UAW and developed relationships with workers across the US and internationally, building a new leadership for autoworkers everywhere.

News of the courageous Volvo strike—in the face of union opposition—has been deliberately blacked out by the union and the corporate media. The primary danger these workers face is isolation. We must not let that happen. We join our voices to those workers around the world who are publicizing and supporting the fight by Volvo workers.

The UAW, for its part, has not only sought to conceal this struggle, but deliberately limited its power by keeping workers on rations of \$275/week (the better to line their own pockets) and refusing to sanction a walkout among other truck workers who are forced to

handle scab-created parts.

Volvo workers have correctly described this as a war on two fronts. We hear you, brothers and sisters, because we have endured the same struggle. For them, it is a war against Volvo and the UAW, the latter of which is supposed to represent them but has done everything in its power to isolate and defeat their strike. For us, we are fighting against powerful political forces who demand that schools be reopened in-person during a deadly pandemic, and the local and national unions who sat by and let us become infected and die. In Montgomery, Alabama, alone, we lost eight educators to COVID-19 in just a few months. Many more have needlessly lost their lives across the American South, throughout the US and globally.

Without any help from the Alabama Education Association (AEA), we took matters into our own hands. We staged sick-outs, marched to the steps of Alabama’s State Capitol, and formed our own rank-and-file committee to put forward concrete demands that asserted what we needed, not what the school board told us was affordable.

To the extent that the district was forced to meet some of our demands—including switching temporarily to fully remote learning and teaching in the spring and renovating some of our dilapidated school buildings—it is due to our independent initiative.

Like us, Volvo workers are told there is “no money.” Meanwhile the company is handing out roughly \$2.3 billion to shareholders. Both Volvo workers and Alabama teachers are being hit with increased health care costs. Alabama enacts a phony two percent “pay raise,” which doesn’t even apply to teachers hired after 2013, under conditions of much higher inflation and

increased health care costs. This pattern is seen across the US.

We must also support and connect with the strike of 1,100 miners at Warrior Met Coal in Brookwood, Alabama. These brave miners have been on strike over two months and are facing increasing physical attacks by company thugs. As with the UAW's isolation of the Volvo strikers, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) is isolating the Warrior Met strikers—starving them on \$300/week strike pay, and refusing to call out other mines in the state or nationally in a broader strike.

The UMWA itself carried out a thuggish and violent attack against podcasters who they mistook for WSWS reporters, a foreshadowing of how they will respond to workers who oppose their betrayals in the future. Striking miners in Alabama must link their struggle with the strike of Volvo workers to ensure the victory of both.

Finally, we must reach out and gather support among autoworkers in Alabama, who make up a significant section of the working class here. Mercedes-Benz, Honda, and Hyundai all have manufacturing plants in Alabama, with a new Mazda-Toyota plant set to open this year, in addition to over 150 auto-parts plants in the state. There are over 40,000 autoworkers in Alabama and counting. We call upon autoworkers in our state to take up the defense of the Volvo strike.

The worldwide solidarity for the Volvo strike, which is developing through rank-and-file committees, marks a turning point in the class struggle. We urge all educators to take up the call to expand these efforts by building the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) today.



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