

Striking Volvo workers in Virginia call for rejection of new tentative agreement

Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee
4 July 2021

This statement was drafted by the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File committee after the United Auto Workers announced a new agreement with Volvo Trucks to end the strike of 2,900 workers in Dublin, Virginia. Volvo and Mack workers can contact the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee at volvowrjc@gmail.com or by text to (540) 307-0509.

The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee calls on workers to vote “no” on the new Tentative Agreement brought back by the UAW. This TA is another sellout that proves workers were right not to trust anything that was agreed to in the dark and behind our backs.

On Thursday, the UAW published a statement on its website, “Striking Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia reach a tentative agreement with major gains.” According to Ray Curry, who became president of the UAW the same day that the TA was announced, this contract “reflects significant gains from the prior two tentative agreements.”

First, “Striking Volvo Trucks workers” have not reached any agreement on anything. Let us remind Curry that it is one thing for the UAW officials to reach an agreement with Volvo management, and it is quite another for workers to accept it. One would have thought they already learned this lesson after we rejected their two previous agreements by 90 percent.

Second, we would like to point out that this is the *first statement that the UAW posted on its website or on its Facebook page since our strike began*. For the past month, the UAW has said *absolutely nothing* about the fact that we were even on strike, keeping our brothers and sisters throughout the auto industry in the dark about our struggle.

Third, Curry now hails the “major gains” in the tentative agreement. Let us recall that Curry said in

May that the second TA had “even more solid gains” than the first, and we told him what we thought of these “even more solid gains” at the time.

Fourth, there is a basic contradiction in what the UAW officials are claiming. When they tried to sell us the last TA, they declared that it was the best we could get. Now, they say that, as a result of our strike, we have won major gains. If the claims about “major gains” are true—which they are not—it only proves that the previous claims made by the UAW were false. Moreover, if there are really improvements in this third contract, they have been achieved because the rank-and-file opposed the previous agreements.

Now let us turn to these “major gains.” Currently, we only have access to the UAW’s “highlights,” but it is already clear that the contract does not meet our basic demands. The CPI inflation index is currently rising by 5 percent a year, driven by the price of gas and other necessities. We need to demand a contract that not only protects us against rising costs, but also makes up for decades of concessions accepted by the UAW.

The Tentative Agreement:

1. Is a six-year contract, which in and of itself is unacceptable. This is almost a fifth of our working lives, and a lot will change by 2027. We demand a two-year contract.
2. Raises top pay by only 12 percent over six years, or an average of about 2 percent a year, with no COLA escalator clause. Given rising inflation, this means that core workers will be getting a substantial cut in real wages. We demand an immediate 25 percent wage increase to make up for past concessions, 6 percent annual increases going forward, plus a COLA escalator clause.
3. Requires *six years* for new hires to reach top pay, compared to three years in the 2008 contract. We

demand the transfer of all workers to top-tier pay and benefits.

4. Contains massive increases of 50-75 percent in health care costs, including premium payments for core workers for the first time, and increases in deductibles for all workers. We demand fully-paid health care for all workers and retirees, with no co-pays or premiums.

5. Reduces the lump sum cash payment from \$3,500 to \$2,000 for non-probationary employees and \$1,000 for new hires. This will not even cover what we have lost while out on strike, receiving only \$275 a week from the UAW strike fund. We demand a \$4,000 contract ratification bonus.

And this is only based on what we know now. This is not a win, but another concessionary contract, which moves a few things around from what we rejected overwhelmingly—twice!

To the UAW, we say that we will not accept the shutdown of our strike or the ramming through of an agreement with lies and intimidation. We demand:

1. Access to the full contract, including all letters of understanding and side agreements, to study and discuss for ten days prior to any vote on the TA.

2. Three full membership meetings with an open mic so that workers can have their questions answered. These meetings must not be held in the plants, where workers can hardly hear themselves speak, let alone get the answers they need.

3. Rank-and-file supervision of the counting of ballots, to ensure that all votes are counted fairly, and the monitoring of all future bargaining by trusted representatives of the rank-and-file.

4. An increase of strike pay equal to the average weekly wage, with the massive financial resources of the UAW and the AFL-CIO mobilized behind the strike to show the company that it won't be able to starve us back to work.

5. The shutdown of all Volvo operations and the organization of solidarity actions by UAW members throughout the country.

In addition, we demand that the UAW stop telling workers that if the contract is rejected there will be compulsory arbitration by a "third party." There is no legal basis for this threat, and the UAW must make clear that it will not be accepted under any circumstances. We will not be bullied into accepting an agreement that does not meet our needs!

To our brothers and sisters, we say: Now is not the time to back down. It is the time to expand our struggle! Volvo wants this strike shut down because inventories are beginning to run low. The company has already implemented temporary layoffs at the Mack Truck plants in Maryland and Pennsylvania.

At the same time, we know that there is immense support for our struggle among Mack workers and auto workers throughout the country and internationally. Mack workers have told us that they want to stop production that uses scab parts, and auto workers from Detroit and Chicago to Europe and India have sent us statements of support. They know that we are fighting not just for ourselves, but for the entire working class.

Victory requires unity: The unity of workers at NRV, unity all Volvo workers, and unity of workers throughout this country and the world. This is the path forward!



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