

WSWS campaigns among Canadian Volvo workers to break UAW's isolation of Dublin, Virginia Volvo Trucks strike

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Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* have intervened at a Volvo-owned Nova Bus plant in suburban Montreal to bring the militant strike mounted by 3,000 Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia to the attention of Canadian workers. The intervention is part of a global campaign to mobilize the international working class, especially the tens of thousands of workers the transnational Volvo employs at plants around the world, behind the Volvo Trucks strikers.

The pro-management UAW (United Auto Workers) union is seeking to strangle the Volvo Trucks workers' struggle. It has refused to even inform its own 390,000 members of the month-long strike, let alone lifted a finger to mobilize support for their struggle.

Workers at the New River Valley (NRV) truck plant have twice overwhelmingly rejected sell-out tentative agreements between management and the UAW. After the first massive no vote, the workers went on strike in mid-April. But the job action was abruptly ended on April 30 by the union, which claimed to have negotiated a better deal. However, the UAW refused to release the full agreement to the Volvo workers.

Responding to the UAW's collaboration with management to enforce concessions, a group of workers formed a rank-and-file committee independent of the union to lead the Volvo workers' struggle. The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC) was able to force the union to release the details of the agreement, which turned out to be a concessions-filled deal no better than the first. It included below-inflation wage increases, a multi-tiered wage grid, ten-hour shifts, and attacks on workers' and retirees' health care. The VWRFC made the contents of the agreement known to other workers and campaigned for a no vote. This played a decisive role in the workers' overwhelming rejection of the deal by 91 percent, which led to the ongoing strike.

Through their rank-and-file committee, workers at the New River Valley plant are now calling on other Volvo

workers and all workers, in the US and internationally, to come to their defense and break the isolation of the strike enforced by the UAW. They are also demanding that the UAW increase their miserable strike pay from the piddling sum of \$275 per week, and that the strike continue until a contract is secured that boosts wages sharply after years of concessions, provides health care and retirement benefit guarantees and abolishes the hated multi-tier system.

The objective conditions are ripe for a unified and coordinated international struggle among workers. This is the only way to defeat transnationals like Volvo, which operates in 18 different countries.

The campaign to break the isolation imposed by the UAW on the Volvo strike has received widespread support, including from autoworkers in India and the US, teachers and other sections of workers in the US, and workers in many other countries, including Sri Lanka, Turkey, Germany and Britain. As the VWRFC declares in a statement published yesterday on the WSWS calling for rejection of the latest concessions-laden contract negotiated by the UAW, "Victory requires unity: The unity of workers at NRV, unity of all Volvo workers, and unity of workers throughout this country and the world. This is the path forward!"

World Socialist Web Site reporters visited a Nova Bus plant, a division of Volvo, in St. Eustache on Montreal's north shore, last week to discuss these issues with workers. The plant, which manufactures electric buses, is located a few kilometers from the former GM assembly plant in Boisbriand, which closed in 2002, eliminating 1,200 jobs. The St. Eustache plant was originally owned by General Motors, before being sold to Volvo and Henlys Group in 1998. Volvo has been the sole owner of Nova Bus since 2004.

In addition to the Nova Bus plant in St. Eustache, two other truck and bus plants are located in the suburbs of Montreal, employing a total of about 2,500 workers. This

includes nearly 500 workers at Nova Bus, which operates two other plants: one on Montreal's South Shore and the other in Plattsburgh, New York.

Due to the Canadian government's disastrously managed COVID-19 vaccine campaign and the threat posed by the Delta variant, reporters limited their interaction with the Nova Bus workers. They left hundreds of flyers on workers' cars calling for a common struggle among all Volvo workers across national borders. The leaflet read in part: "Workers in Canada, and indeed all over the world, face the same challenges. For decades, the ruling class, whether under governments led by Liberals, the Conservatives, or the Quebec nationalists of the Parti Québécois (PQ) and the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ), has been attacking working conditions and basic democratic rights, such as the right to strike. The unions, led by a well-heeled bureaucracy that tenaciously defends the capitalist profit system, have long abandoned workers to their fate."

The flyer urged workers to "revive the rich tradition of solidarity between Canadian and American workers!"

From the limited exchanges that were possible in the circumstances, the WSWs reporters learned that the Nova Bus workers were completely unaware of the struggle that their class brothers and sisters in Virginia are mounting against their common transnational bosses. This is not surprising, since Unifor Local 1004 in St. Eustache, and the entire union bureaucracy in Canada and the US, have deliberately blacked out the strike in Virginia for fear that it could inspire other workers to follow suit. For decades, the union bureaucracy in every country, including Unifor in Canada, has worked in partnership with corporate management to slash jobs, wages, and working conditions, and suppressed all working class struggles against these attacks.

One young Nova Bus worker said he supported the Volvo strikers. However, he thought that what was happening in Virginia did not directly concern Nova Bus workers in Canada. A WSWs reporter responded that in an era of economic globalization, dominated by transnationals like Volvo that operate globally integrated production chains and scour the world seeking the highest profits, any struggle that remains isolated is doomed to failure. He explained that to beat the giant Volvo, workers must be united across borders. He also noted that if Volvo succeeds in extorting concessions from the Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia, it will serve as new benchmark in demanding "globally competitive" labour costs everywhere, including at its Canadian operations. The young worker agreed that social conditions "can change quickly."

In fact, there is already in Canada, as in other countries, a growing rebellion of workers against decades of concessions

and austerity. Workers' anger is also being driven by the disastrous response of the ruling class to the pandemic, which has resulted in more than 26,000 official COVID-19 deaths in Canada, and unprecedented levels of social inequality, thanks to the ruling class' "profits before lives" policy.

In recent months, a series of militant strikes have taken place. Since June 1, 2,450 miners in Sudbury, Ontario have been on strike against the multinational Vale's demands for sweeping concessions. In northeastern Quebec, 2,500 ArcelorMittal workers were on strike for four weeks beginning in early May. Two major food processing plants near Quebec City, with more than 1,500 workers, have been rocked by strikes. The 1,150 longshoremen at the Port of Montreal were on strike for a week in late April until the Trudeau Liberal government criminalized their job action with back-to-work legislation. All these workers are facing giant companies, some operating in several different countries, with annual profits in the hundreds of millions and billions of dollars.

They are also confronting the anti-democratic, pro-business laws of the Canadian federal and provincial governments. Hundreds of thousands of public sector and construction workers in Quebec have been threatened with "emergency" back-to-work legislation by the province's right-wing CAQ government.

Workers are rebelling not only against the endless demands of the employers and governments for concessions and cuts, but also against the unions. These organizations are increasingly seen by workers for what they really are: corrupt, pro-capitalist and nationalist apparatuses that collaborate with management to impose its socially retrogressive demands.

In several of the disputes mentioned above, workers have rejected sell-out tentative agreements that were endorsed by their union. The United Steelworkers' bargaining committee unanimously recommended Vale's concession-filled rotten offer to the Sudbury miners. They responded by voting down the proposed deal by 70 percent and launching their strike, now in its second month.



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