

“Claim your rights! They are making billions off of our backs”

Volvo workers in Ghent, Belgium, support the strike in Virginia, US

Our reporters
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Volvo autoworkers in Ghent, Belgium, have expressed their support for the ongoing struggle by more than 3,000 of their counterparts in Dublin, Virginia, who have been on strike for more than four weeks.

Reporters for the World Socialist Web Site spoke to workers at the Volvo Cars and Volvo Trucks plants in Ghent yesterday. They also distributed hundreds of copies of the Open Letter from Ulrich Rippert to the Ghent workers. Rippert is the leader of the Socialist Equality Party (SGP), the German section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, and an SGP candidate in the upcoming German federal elections.

The letter calls for breaking the isolation of the strike in the US and mobilizing reinforcements from workers in other plants in the US, Europe and around the world. Only in this way, it says, can the struggle against the multinational be won and a collective bargaining agreement reached that reverses the wage and social cuts of recent years.

There are more than 6,500 autoworkers employed by Volvo in Ghent, of whom 2,000 are employed at the Volvo Trucks plant. The city is located in the Flemish-speaking region of Belgium. WSWs reporters encountered widespread support for the strike.

“They have my support,” said Steven, from Volvo Trucks. “The only thing we can do is try to be one front. Now there is a global pandemic against social rights. I think it’s going to become harder and harder to fight for our rights and keep them, because the media is basically controlled by the governments. What I can say for the American workers is: try to look back on the past to your ancestors and see how they fought for their

rights, and try to fight for the rights that the working class has today.

“Young people can forget that every right they have has been fought for. Really try to understand that everything they have they have to fight every day for,” he said. “Here in Belgium wages are no longer in sync with the rising cost of food and other things. Politicians don’t even reach out to us. It’s good for the employers.”

“Claim your rights!” said Izaak, with five years at the plant. “You have the right for it, so claim it! They are making billions off of our backs. The higher ups in the company are getting millions.

“Here as well they cut us big in our annual bonuses that go into the pension fund. This year mine fell from 1,000 euros to 76 euros.

“We should create one big front of all the people for the working class,” he said. “Not for the higher ups—then you could do something.”

“Stay strong and keep your faith!” said Dalilah at Volvo Trucks. “I will tell everyone about your strike!”

Many workers had not heard of the strike until receiving the leaflet, or had heard about it only through articles from the World Socialist Web Site which had been shared on Facebook. A number of workers noted that they had heard nothing from the union. They drew a parallel between the role of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union in presenting concessions-laden contracts to the striking workers in the US with the union in Belgium.

“It’s simple, the union here is paid by Volvo,” said Mario, from Volvo Cars. “They have to collaborate with Volvo.” This year, he noted, the company was now expanding the number of working hours from 38

to 40 hours per week.

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

Michael, who has been at Volvo Cars for 10 years, said: “We don’t see the union here, unless it’s election time. But otherwise they do very little. It’s not the union of a long time ago. They’re here just for their own position.” He noted that while autoworkers in the US had been kept in the dark about the Volvo strike by the UAW, “here, we have three plants inside Volvo, and if there is some trouble in one plant, we do not even hear about it in the others.

“What they are doing [in America] is what they must do. You have to put down tools and fight for your rights.”

“We’re all working for the same company, the same CEO,” said Dennis. “It’s right if we’re all on the same side at this time.

“It’s important to tell the workers [in Virginia] that we all made one big team during the pandemic, so it’s a good idea that we make a big team for Volvo employees everywhere.

“If we hadn’t see the article about this on Facebook we wouldn’t know about the strike,” he added. “We have spoken for years” about the fact that the union is paid directly by Volvo. “They have a very nice regime in day-time work, while we are on shifts.”

“I would say to the Volvo workers, stick together,” said Alexander. “Strength is in numbers, even if you have to go against the union there.”



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