

With UAW moving to impose sellout, autoworkers must come to the defense of the Volvo Trucks strike!

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With the United Auto Workers moving to bully 3,000 Volvo Trucks workers at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia into a sellout deal, it is urgent that autoworkers in Detroit and around the country come to the defense of these courageous workers and their month-long strike.

Volvo workers are in a battle not only with the Swedish multinational, but with the UAW. The new agreement, which UAW President Ray Curry claims contains “substantial gains,” is another concessionary contract, with wages that do not keep pace with inflation, a six-year wage progression for new hires, sharp increases in health care costs and attacks on pension benefits.

Far from mobilizing UAW members to support the strike, Curry & Co. have sought to punish the Volvo workers for their insolence. The UAW has sought to isolate them by concealing the strike from other UAW members and starve them into submission with \$275 a week in strike benefits, even though Solidarity House sits on a strike fund of nearly \$800 million. The first article on the UAW’s website on the month-long strike was posted last Thursday, when Curry announced the tentative agreement.

The Volvo workers’ fight is the fight of every autoworker. All workers are facing the erosion of their living standards through the relentless rise in food and gas prices. GM, Ford and Stellantis workers must be organized to prepare for fights coming down the pike, with the rapid shift towards electric vehicles and widespread layoffs which it will produce, as well as the expiration of the national contracts at the Big Three automakers in 2023.

If the strike is not to be defeated, autoworkers across the country must mobilize to defend it from the UAW’s attempts to isolate and betray it. This must be done

through the formation of a network of rank-and-file solidarity committees at auto plants throughout the country to pierce the union’s blackout and prepare for joint action with Volvo Trucks workers.

Workers at Volvo-owned Mack Trucks in Allentown, Pennsylvania, have already taken the first step by forming a solidarity committee of their own, in opposition to the UAW’s arbitrary division of them from their brothers and sisters at Volvo Trucks.

The Volvo Trucks strike is the most significant labor struggle in the country because it is a highly conscious rebellion against the union bureaucracy, which has spent decades collaborating with the companies to reduce the income of workers and boost the profits of the corporations and Wall Street. Volvo Trucks workers have already rejected two sellout contracts by 9-to-1 margins.

Most importantly, they have formed an alternative organization, the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), to mobilize opposition to the UAW and unite with autoworkers throughout the country to extend the strike and overturn decades of UAW-backed concessions. The formation of the committee at Volvo points the way forward for all autoworkers, as well as for workers in every other industry.

The VWRFC has outlined a series of demands based on what all workers need, including an immediate 25 percent across-the-board pay raise, plus a 6 percent per year wage increase and an additional COLA escalator clause to protect against soaring prices. Workers also want an end to the multi-tier wage system and the transfer of all workers to top-tier pay and benefits. They want to protect current health insurance rates and coverage, fully paid health care benefits for retirees, and a \$4,000 contract ratification bonus.

A victory for the Volvo workers will embolden workers

throughout the auto industry and, indeed, throughout the world, and give workers confidence that they can mobilize their collective strength. The last thing the UAW wants, however, is for the Volvo workers to show GM, Stellantis and Ford workers that real gains can be won by organizing independently of the corporatist UAW and fighting for demands workers and their families need.

Every autoworker is familiar with the underhanded methods the UAW executives use to ram through pro-company contracts. In Virginia, the UAW has refused to provide workers with the full version of the tentative agreement and has only released supposed “highlights” of the deal that will govern workers’ lives the next six years. The UAW has refused to give Volvo workers sufficient time to study and discuss the deal and is rushing to get it ratified on Friday, by hook or by crook.

Autoworkers will also be familiar with the list of corrupt UAW officials who “negotiated” the last four Volvo contracts, which introduced two-tier wages and benefits, cut pay and benefits, and reduced labor costs by over 30 percent. The rogues include General Holifield and Norwood Jewell, who took corporate bribes, and Gary Casteel, who only escaped prosecution by becoming a government informer.

The UAW is desperate to end the strike because they know that the longer it goes on, the more the union's blackout will break down, and the more autoworkers will strive to defend the Volvo strike and develop organizational links with them for a joint struggle.

The UAW knows that the auto plants belonging to Stellantis, Ford and General Motors are a powder keg, and are terrified that the Volvo strike will provide the spark which sets it off. For months, autoworkers have been subjected to conditions which exceed human endurance.

Stellantis workers at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) near Detroit, for example, have been working forced overtime for the entire year, and skilled trades in the plants are working a new 84-hour workweek with no overtime pay. Workers at other plants deal with constant uncertainty, roller-coasting between the extremes of lengthy layoffs due to the global microchip shortage and massive levels of overtime when their plants reopen, a state of affairs that is constantly throwing their lives upside down.

All of this has taken place as the coronavirus has spread throughout the plants nearly unabated. In April, hundreds of workers were under quarantine at any given time at SHAP. Throughout the pandemic, dozens of workers have likely died, although a true count is not possible because

of the joint union-company coverup. Workers have lost coworkers, friends and loved ones to the virus, and know from bitter experience that all measures to contain the spread have been sabotaged in the interests of corporate profit.

The UAW's announced end to most remaining COVID-19 restrictions in the plants, together with the end of social distancing measures by the Biden administration and state governments, will make a new and deadly surge of the virus virtually inevitable, despite the media's lying claims that the pandemic is over.

The UAW and the auto companies remember well last year's wildcat strike wave, in which workers defied a UAW-brokered agreement to keep plants running through the initial surge and forced a shutdown of production for two months. This rebellion against the UAW saved countless lives, but to the chagrin of the corporate stooges in the misnamed Solidarity House, cost the auto companies billions of dollars. They are determined to prevent a repeat at all costs.

That strike wave proved that workers are more powerful than the UAW apparatus, when they mobilize themselves independently. That strength can and must be mobilized again in defense of the Volvo Trucks strike.

Autoworkers in Detroit and around the country must begin mobilizing immediately to support of the Volvo strikers.

Here are three things which you can do—right now—to help:

1. Submit a statement to the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee at volvowrfc@gmail.com or by text at (540) 307-0509 to show your support for the strike.

2. Distribute this statement, and other material on the strike, as widely as possible among your co-workers to break the information blackout.

3. Contact the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* to begin the process of forming a Volvo Strike Solidarity Committee at your plant.

More is at stake than a contract in a single factory. The strike is part of a national and international wave of strikes and protests by workers, angered by the pro-corporate subordination of lives to profit during the pandemic and emboldened by the ongoing labor shortage.



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