

Volvo workers in Belgium down tools over expanded workweek

Our reporters

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Workers at the Volvo Cars plant in Ghent, Belgium, downed their tools and shut down production Thursday, in a wildcat protest over the company's plans to increase the workweek from 37.5 hours to 40 hours.

The action involved hundreds of workers on the morning shift and was at least partially extended into the afternoon shift. Reports also indicate that the night shift has not reported for work.

According to Belgian news site hln.be, the agreement to extend the workweek "had been approved by the trade unions, but was not checked beforehand with the workers." Volvo sent out a letter to workers this week announcing the change.

Following the spontaneous protest by workers, the company announced that it was temporarily delaying the change but was determined to move forward. "To be clear, the 40-hour week is not up for discussion," declared company spokesperson Barbar Blomme. "Our successful model XC40 is in high demand, and that is one of the reasons why we need to increase production." She said that the change would be implemented following further "consultations" after the summer.

The work action by Volvo Cars workers in Belgium comes on the eve of a vote by 2,900 Volvo Trucks workers at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia, on the third tentative agreement proposed by the United Auto Workers. The Virginia workers have been on strike for just over a month, following the overwhelming rejection of the two previous agreements supported by the UAW.

Volvo Cars is owned separately from Volvo Trucks, but plants for the two companies remain near each other in Ghent.

The spontaneous protest also came only two days after a *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team

campaigned at both Volvo Cars and Volvo Trucks in Ghent, informing workers about the strike in Virginia. Workers in Belgium expressed strong support for their coworkers in the US, which has enormously encouraged the resolve of the striking Volvo workers.

One worker in Virginia said of the support from workers at Ghent: "These guys in Europe are dealing with the same thing we have to deal with. We feel their pain, and it's nice to know they feel our pain. It's definitely inspirational.

"Don't get me wrong, it's great to hear from [workers at] Stellantis, Frito-Lay, Ford and other companies in the US, but when it's workers from the same company they know the way that the corporation works, the way that it tries to brainwash you. So to get a thumbs up from them is extra special. They are dealing with the same thing just on a different continent. The company has the same mentality there, and they feed these workers the same crap. So having your own people from different plants step up and say 'We got your back' is great.

The worker added that he had sent the video of Ghent workers supporting Virginia workers to others in the plant. "Many are in a state of disbelief that the workers in Ghent are supporting us. The timing of the video could not have been better. Right as Volvo is trying to scare us with their public relations machine, right before the vote we see this video and it reignites the fire."



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