Volvo workers strike continues for second day in Ghent, Belgium

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Volvo Cars workers in Ghent, Belgium continued their wildcat strike into a second day on Friday morning. The strike takes place as Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia, United States are due to vote today on a new contract worked out between the United Auto Workers (UAW) union and Volvo management.

The Ghent strike began with the morning shift on Thursday, when only a portion of workers started their shift. It continued into the afternoon and evening shifts. Friday morning, workers reported on Facebook that the strike action continued at least partially into the day shift. Not a single vehicle rolled off the production line on Thursday as a result of the strike.

The Ghent strike developed as a wildcat action in a rebellion against an agreement reached between company management and the union. The agreement would have meant that 6,000 out of the 6,500 workers would have been compelled to work an additional 2.5 hours per week, up from 37.5 to 40 hours. The strike began after the company sent a notice to employees this week informing them of the change.

Some work was reportedly partially resumed yesterday evening after management pledged to delay further discussions on the lengthening of the work week until after the summer holidays. However, management has made clear that it has no intention of negotiating on the increase of working hours and that the 40-hour week is "not up for discussion."

Volvo Cars workers took to Facebook to denounce the company-union deal and express their hostility toward the union, which is widely viewed as an arm of company management. The union did not even bother to hold a vote on the extension of the working week.

Lorenzo B wrote: "Don't stop, striking colleagues! Now is the time to make clear that we mean business."

Referring to management's pledge to delay discussions on lengthening the work week, Lorenzo added: "This pause button is purely for the purpose of making their cars before the [summer] holidays. After the holidays, Volvo is just going to continue with their plan as if nothing happened… It clearly states that the change to working times is a non-negotiable condition. And just that condition is the problem for a lot of colleagues. The traffic jams. Our free time. The need for a second car for our partners. Problems taking children to day care. No compensation whatsoever for what we all have to give up. And so on. It's downright scandalous."

"I have been working at Volvo for 37 years," wrote Heirbrandt. "The union delegates are on the side of the [company] board—being pampered with company cars with fuel cards and traveling to supposedly European meetings with Sweden and China. These people no longer stand for the staff."

Geert wrote: "Our parents successfully fought to get rid of that 40-hour week. It must be that the unions agreed to it, because otherwise [Volvo management] wouldn't be able to implement it. They may have promised something to the buffoons who agreed to it."

Peggy described the impact of the 40-hour work change upon the lives of the workers: "Working more for the same pay, less time to watch our kids grow. Family life will go to zero, people will become sick long-term, they will go through more work and an even higher workload will be created. There will be more people with burn-out. Older workers are going to stay more at home due to illness, accidents, etc. What about the welding factory, some people there are already working from 6 to 7… Do we go to 48 hours a week soon? Single parents will also have to arrange shelter for their kids."

Mario wrote: "The union of Volvo Cars now is of no

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use to us. Instead of standing in front of the employees, they are far behind us."

Another worker wrote anonymously on a Facebook page for Volvo Ghent workers: "It's been in the air for a while. For weeks there has been gossip about introducing the 40-hour working week at Volvo... This week they announced it with a foolish video and a booklet. No one on my team is falling for this. Supposedly this would be for our health? Working more is good for your health?…

"I hear a lot of young people saying they're not happy either. They're losing their Friday! I'm not the youngest myself, but I also want to keep my Friday for seeing my friends or family. It's also tough for the older colleagues. Do you want to work at this rate any longer? Many can't go on like this even now...

"An older colleague, who has been working at Volvo for 30 years, told me this is the biggest change he has ever seen in his career... They tried that before, and people also had to fight to get rid of it then. And now they think it's just going to pass? Without even asking the opinion of the people…? That's not possible! We are the ones who would have to knock over our entire family life, to work the extra hours.

"I'm not surprised that people are on strike now. This is really being shoved down our throat. We should be able to vote on this agreement. Volvo is just scared. They know the people are going to vote this out."

The latest strike has erupted two days after a *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team travelled to Ghent to speak with Volvo Cars and Volvo Trucks workers about the ongoing strike in Virginia. There is widespread support among the Ghent workers for the struggle in Virginia.

In order to develop their struggle, the Volvo Ghent workers should draw the lessons from the struggle of their counterparts in the United States, who formed a rank-and-file committee, independent of the pro-company United Auto Workers union. Such a committee, directly controlled by the workers themselves and independent of the pro-corporate union, would permit the Volvo workers to organise their struggle, including by making a direct appeal to their co-workers in the United States.

The WSWS will provide every assistance to autoworkers in Ghent in such an initiative. We encourage workers interested in forming such a committee to contact us directly using the form below.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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