

Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia reject third consecutive sellout deal, in massive rebuke of UAW

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9 July 2021

Striking Volvo Trucks workers at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia voted down a third consecutive concessions contract Friday, by 60 percent to 40 percent.

The rejection of the agreement is a powerful expression of the Volvo workers' determination to fight and a debacle for the United Auto Workers, which pulled out all the stops in its attempt to ram it through. It is part of a growing mood of rebellion and opposition among workers in the US and internationally.

The third tentative agreement was largely a rehash of the two previous agreements, which workers rejected by 90 percent. Workers cited the fact that it included wage increases for "core" workers below the rate of inflation, sharp increases to out-of-pocket healthcare costs and a six-year wage progression for new hires.

Workers were particularly angered by the continued attacks on retiree healthcare. "It's criminal what the UAW and Volvo have done to the retirees," one worker said. "The UAW mismanaged the retirement fund, and the company has no problem telling 30-plus year retirees that your entire check will be used to pay for health insurance when they were told it would be paid for."

Workers also reacted with fury at the threats issued by Volvo management on the eve of the vote. In a Q&A document posted two days ago, the company threatened to cancel planned investments in the plant and deny workers their usual vacation pay for the summer re-tooling if they did not vote for the agreement.

During the vote itself, workers reported that UAW officials were actively campaigning outside the union hall for a "yes" vote. In its effort to quickly force the agreement through, the UAW refused to give copies of the full contract to workers or provide adequate time to consider and discuss the proposal. The union did not even bother to hold membership meetings to try to sell the

contract to workers, fearing that these could have become focal points for workers' anger over the sellout.

The UAW, clearly stunned by the outcome, issued a tersely worded statement Friday night, announcing that the strike would continue and that "The elected UAW Local 2069 Bargaining Committee will continue to work to negotiate a fair contract that reflects the value of this hardworking membership."

Volvo NRV Vice President and General Manager Frankie Marchand issued a statement hailing the supposed "significant wage gains and first-class benefits" in the agreement and citing the "strong support it garnered from UAW leadership at every level."

In a clear threat directed at workers, Marchand added: "Now that our employees have rejected three successive agreements endorsed by the leaders they elected to represent them, we need to consider our next steps." The strike has "already set back our project to expand and upgrade the facility, and we will consider all options related to the bargaining process."

The previous two agreements rejected by workers also received the "strong support" of the UAW, which completely ignored "the value of this hardworking membership." All three agreements involved substantial concessions, or the perpetuation of past concessions, and failed to address the real concerns and needs of the workers.

Volvo management and the UAW are currently working on a strategy to shut the strike down and impose the demands of the company. Over the past week, the UAW has attempted to frighten workers into voting yes by claiming that negotiations could be declared at an "impasse" and a contract unilaterally imposed in federal arbitration. In reality, there is no "impasse" between the UAW and Volvo, but between the company and the

union, on one hand, and the workers, on the other.

Throughout the month-long strike, the UAW sought to isolate the Volvo Trucks workers, not even informing its members that the strike was taking place. Indeed, the UAW's first acknowledgement on its national website that the strike was taking place came last week when it announced the deal to end it.

Opposition to the UAW-backed agreements has been organized by the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), which issued a statement calling for a "no" vote.

A member of the VWRFC told the *World Socialist Web Site* after the vote: "The people are waking up. We've got a fire in our belly. We are really showing some unity and strength. No one is asking for more than we deserve. The company is just pushing us too much, and we aren't going to allow it. There is still a long way to go, but we are willing to go the distance and fight the good fight.

"This is our occupation, our future. They are trying to strip everything away. If they can't offer [health] insurance, what's the point of working for them?"

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls on Volvo workers to demand the immediate resignation of the entire bargaining committee, which brought back this contract and its predecessors to workers.

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

The UAW bargaining committee must be replaced by a committee elected by the rank-and-file, composed of workers who have the confidence and trust of the rank-and-file. The last three agreements should be put where they belong: in the garbage can. Negotiations must proceed from what workers have been demanding all along: significant wage increases, a cost-of-living escalator clause to meet soaring inflation, the elimination of tiers by elevating all workers to the top tier, protection of healthcare and pensions and other key demands.

The rejection of the third TA is an enormous step forward. It is not only a rejection of a contract, but a declaration of rebellion against the UAW. It marks an end to a 40-year period in which the unions have worked to artificially suppress the class struggle and impose the demands of management.

The development of the strike now requires its expansion to Volvo-Mack workers, other Volvo workers, and all auto workers. This requires the formation of a network of rank-and-file solidarity committees to prepare and organize joint action.

The workers in Dublin, Virginia have been enormously strengthened by the statements of support from workers throughout the US and internationally. On the eve of the vote in Virginia, Volvo Cars workers in Ghent, Belgium launched a wildcat strike against a union-management agreement to increase the workweek. The walkout came only two days after a campaign team from the WSWS visited the plant to build support for the strike in Virginia.

The slave conditions which Volvo workers are fighting against are the same being foisted on workers at plants all over the world, where workers have endured mandatory overtime in spite of massive levels of infections and death throughout the course of the coronavirus pandemic.

The "no" vote is already beginning to have a galvanizing impact among autoworkers in Detroit. "This is solidarity at its finest," one worker at Stellantis' Sterling Heights Assembly Plant said. "I hope it spreads throughout all UAW facilities as a show of support for the Volvo workers."

This support must be organized. Now more than ever, strikers must join the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee and build it as the alternative leadership of the strike, to carry out a real struggle against the company and unite the fight in Dublin with the auto workers and other sections of the working class throughout the US and around the world.

Sign up today to join the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee or a solidarity committee.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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