

Autoworkers voice support for Volvo strikers, oppose company-UAW strikebreaking: “All autoworkers should be on strike to support them”

Our reporters
12 July 2021

Autoworkers in Detroit and Chicago responded with outrage upon learning of the United Auto Workers’ (UAW) attempt to shut down the five-week strike at Volvo Trucks in Dublin, Virginia. Although workers voted down a third tentative agreement last Friday, the UAW is forcing workers at Volvo’s New River Valley plant to vote on the exact same agreement again this Wednesday and has told them the company will impose the deal no matter which way they vote.

Autoworkers voiced their solidarity with Volvo workers against the attempted strikebreaking by the company and the UAW, and support is growing throughout the auto plants for a united struggle with the Volvo workers, who, like autoworkers in the Midwest and elsewhere, are fighting against substandard pay and benefits, attacks on retirees, the elimination of the eight-hour day and other major concessions foisted upon them by the UAW.

A campaign team for the *World Socialist Web Site* visited Stellantis’s Warren Stamping Plant just north of Detroit on Monday to discuss the developments in the strike with workers. The campaign revealed powerful levels of support for Volvo workers. While some had not yet heard of the strike due to the UAW blackout on the struggle, none were surprised to hear of the union’s dirty tricks.

“I’ve only just heard that this strike was even going on from you right now, but that’s exactly the same thing the UAW is doing here!” Lawrence, an autoworker at Warren Stamping Plant, told campaigners for the WSWS. “They work for the company. These guys deserve to be sued into the ground. All of them are in jail already, and yet nothing has changed.”

Craig told the WSWS: “I support the Volvo workers. Let’s stand in solidarity against these companies and the UAW placing profit before people. I agree with their fight to end the two-tier system, everyone should be paid the same amount. You shouldn’t be working next to someone and they’re making twice the amount you’re making, it’s BS. I’ve been a Tier 2 worker for a while, so I understand the struggles and the pain, so let’s just all stand together and go against the corporations.”

“They should have gotten rid of the tiers long ago,” Gregg, another Warren stamping worker, said. “Same work, same pay.

The conditions are pretty similar [here as at Volvo], but tell Volvo workers to keep fighting. Just tell them to stand on it. Tell them we got their back 100 percent.”

Chappelle, a newer Tier 2 worker, stated, “We’re here for you, the workers in Detroit have your back. We definitely need to build a rank-and-file committee here. The multi-tier system is not good. They say that after three months you’re supposed to get regular pay, but I know a lot of workers where that’s not the case.”

A high-seniority worker expressed his support for the strike and reviewed his experience with the auto industry. “I’m from Youngstown, Ohio, originally, so naturally I support the Volvo strike because this is my neck of the woods. Not too far from where I grew up was the Lordstown plant, which they shut down in 2019. I was a kid when people were getting construction jobs building the plant. I remember the Lordstown strike in 1972 very well. That was a bitter fight.

“I had relatives who were Teamsters. Back in the day, when they went on strike, that was serious, not like what the unions have now. On the picket lines it was like war.

“Now, they’ve used automation to slash jobs repeatedly. Back in the day, a stamping plant used to have 3,500 or so workers. Then they cut that in half and cut it in half again. There’s only a fraction of the workforce still at Warren Stamping compared to when I first started working here a decade ago.

“Before transferring to Warren, I used to work at Twinsburg Stamping Plant outside of Cleveland until it closed in 2010. I’m close to retirement; as soon as I finish my time here, I’m going back home to Ohio.” He also said he personally knew Terry Garr, another former Twinsburg worker who died earlier this year in an accident at Sterling Stamping Plant.

“I knew [him] from since he was hired in at Twinsburg. I knew his mother very well. Everyone thought the world of him. Then I got a call from a buddy of mine from Twinsburg not too long ago, who is working in Kokomo now, who said, ‘Have you heard that Terry died?’ It was a big shock. “The issues that they are facing here in Stellantis are the same as at Volvo. In particular, the way they are attacking the younger generation with the tiers. I’m close to retirement now, but the younger people coming in, they won’t

have that same opportunity.”

The WSWS separately spoke with Ron, a Stellantis worker in Detroit. “The Volvo workers should have everything they demand. People fought real hard to have COLA and other demands and the companies want to strip us of everything and make us at-will employees on our knees before the powers that be.

“Simply put, if Volvo can get to do this in Virginia, it can happen to us in Detroit. GM, Ford and Stellantis can apply the same approach if we vote down our contracts. As far as the UAW is concerned, doesn’t matter if workers voted down 10 contracts, they want the Volvo workers to vote again until they ‘get it right.’ The UAW does not represent us.

“The Volvo workers voted ‘no’ and the UAW is doing the company’s dirty work. Workers are becoming aware of this. The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee has given workers something to look forward too. It has strengthened them. We have to make these committees the norm and popularize them in every factory. We have to make ourselves the power and not live under the foot of these two entities—the companies and the UAW.

“There are growing numbers of people who understand the seriousness of what is happening with the Volvo workers. Others are like ‘out of sight, out of mind.’ There was a different culture years ago, when workers would not put up with things. But now there are more militant and thoughtful workers speaking up in the plants and others are stopping and listening. They know they are not just bellyaching but telling the truth.

“If the UAW and Volvo can do that in Virginia, they can do it to us too. Imposing a contract that workers just rejected is like a slap in the face. It’s like the Electoral College or Trump overturning an election. It’s crazy to say, but it’s like a dictatorship and clearly that’s what the government wants it to be. No one will have a say over their own conditions. It’s ‘do your job or we’ll put you on skid row. You shut up and fall in line, or else.’

“The Volvo strike is a pivotal point for all workers. All autoworkers should be on strike to support them. That would be a clear, concise statement to all the corporations and the UAW. That would be a response that they didn’t see and would not be prepared for. All autoworkers should drop our tools and walk back from the line like we did during the wildcat strikes over COVID. We produce everything and should hold the means of production hostage. That would be a huge blow to the corporations and Volvo would be ready to give workers a good contract.

“All over, workers are being exploited. At Frito-Lay, they’re working back-to-back 12-hour ‘suicide shifts.’ No wonder some workers are dying from overdoses or piling up in traffic. They’re tired and stress out. And when you’re like that you start to think about all the other things you’re sick and tired about, and it starts to snowball. People are refusing to be overworked and they are doing little personal strikes. But we have to act collectively and for that we need a leadership and a strategy.

“When the Belgian workers learned about the Volvo strike in the US, it didn’t take them long to put their knowledge into action,” he said, referring to the wildcat strike that workers at the Volvo Cars plant in Ghent, Belgium last week, in opposition to the union-management deal to increase the workweek.

A veteran Ford Chicago Assembly worker told the *World*

Socialist Web Site that he had been following the Volvo strike on the WSWS, having not heard anything about it from the UAW. He said, “I’ve been looking to see what similarities there were between Volvo’s contracts and the Big Three’s, since it may be foretelling of what the UAW is thinking of doing with us.”

Describing the UAW’s well-worn practice of concealing concessions from workers prior to contract votes, he continued, “What the UAW says they’re getting are just the highlights, there’s never that other part, what we’re giving up. That’s the important thing of all of this.

“They played a really good card with all the temps here at Ford in 2019, telling them they’d be in progression in four years, all these things. Now that we’re going through all these production halts, all of this is affecting them, not to mention that they’re not getting any SUB pay. There’s no certainty for them.

“I’ve seen a lot of new faces when I go back to work. I am positive I’m going to see a lot more new faces this time around, when we go back in August. They’re having a hard, hard time keeping people.”

Describing the decreasing ability of the UAW to suppress opposition and block a socialist perspective via red-baiting and fomenting of anticommunist sentiments, he continued, “For some reason the UAW thinks we’re still living in that era when we buy their newspapers on Sunday and are interested in what they have to say. That’s not the case anymore.

“I don’t know anybody at this point in time who would walk away if something or someone had socialism in the name, especially if it benefits them. It’s like workers are saying now, ‘It says socialist, but these people are saying we should vote down the contract because the wages aren’t good, it’s got concessions, that we should be fighting for more.’ Doesn’t seem so bad.

“It certainly is a different time. I don’t think workers are going to go against their own well-being. I think the government and large corporations counted on that before, and the UAW and the company counted on tiring and stressing people out. I don’t think that’s going to fly nowadays. This pandemic has made people aware there’s a life beyond the four walls and their work.”

Addressing himself to Volvo workers, he said, “Companies look after their own interests, why shouldn’t we? It’s a very logical thing, they’re going to fight for their interests, and we have to fight for our own.

“The one point I would really like to emphasize to workers at Volvo is don’t trust the UAW on anything. You know what you’re capable of. Workers know their worth, so fight for it.

“The company is always going to say they’re on hard times. We saw it with Ford when they were crying about it in our last contracts. None of the executives and people at the top are losing their homes, none of them are starving, none of them have to make ends meet, like the workers do. Fight for what you rightfully deserve.”



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