UAW claims revote of Volvo Trucks contract passes by 17 ballots, while workers raise accusations of fraud

Marcus Day
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United Auto Workers Local 2069 announced at 8:43 p.m. Wednesday evening that the revote on a tentative agreement previously rejected by Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia passed by 17 votes. Within 30 minutes of the announcement, the UAW told workers that pickets were being shut down and the strike ended "as we speak."

According to the local, out of a total of 2,369 votes cast for the common language portion of the contract, 1,193 voted "yes" and 1,176 voted "no," or in percentage terms, 50.3 percent to 49.7 percent. The UAW claims the section of the contract covering hourly workers passed by a similar margin, 1,147 to 1,130. The section covering salaried workers was rejected, with 54 "no" votes versus 40 "yes" votes.

Workers immediately responded on social media with widespread outrage and disgust. Many challenged the legitimacy of the result, accusing the UAW of fraud and ballot rigging, with others calling for either a recount or another vote. "Revote! Too close to call!" read one popular comment. "Sounds to me like they had just enough time delaying the results to switch the needed votes," said another. "The fix is in."

A Volvo worker expressed the convictions of many when he told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I'm sure there was a truck sitting around with a bunch of 'yes' votes. From the beginning, the UAW and Volvo were trying to figure out how best to feed us this crap sandwich."

The UAW has provided ample grounds for workers' suspicions of ballot rigging. The ratification announcement itself came more than three hours after voting concluded, a longer delay than the previous three vote counts resulting in overwhelming rejections. During this time, Local 2069 President Matt Blondino and other top local union officials were undoubtedly consulting with the UAW's misnamed "Solidarity House" headquarters over how to proceed.

The balloting process was overseen by Missy Edwards, chair of Local 2069's election committee, who had campaigned for a "yes" vote in the run-up to Wednesday. She told workers earlier in the week that they would have to return to work regardless of the outcome of the vote.

Additionally, workers received inside reports in the early evening that a set of keys to the ballot boxes was mysteriously lost. Other workers raised questions on Facebook over the discrepancy between the total number of votes on the contract's "common language," 2,369, versus the combined total votes on hourly language and salaried language, 2,371.

With every aspect of the UAW's actions throughout the contract negotiations characterized by treachery and deceit, there is no reason to believe that its claims that the vote resulted in ratification are legitimate.

Shortly after Local 2069 released the vote totals, the UAW International issued a statement shot through with cynical dishonesty. It cited newly installed UAW President Ray Curry as stating, "The democratic process played out at Volvo Trucks. UAW Members stood together through their strike and now the overall agreement and hourly agreement have been ratified despite the company's actions earlier in the week."

In reality, the UAW has worked assiduously with the company to completely trample any pretense of a "democratic process" underfoot, while providing cover for the "company's actions" in ramming through an agreement that the workers rejected.

Wednesday's vote was conducted by the UAW in defiance of the will of the majority of workers, who voted by a 60 percent margin Friday against a third tentative concessionary agreement between the union and the company. The third deal was little changed from two earlier UAW-backed agreements that workers voted down by 90 percent.

With the disruption to its production and the delay in order fulfillment reaching a crisis point for Volvo over the weekend, and with support for the strike and the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee growing among workers in the US and in other countries, the company announced Sunday that it had reached an "impasse" in contract discussions with the UAW. Retroactively declaring the third agreement its "last, best and final offer," the company took the extraordinary step of announcing it would impose the defeated contract beginning Monday of this week.

The company's naked strikebreaking would not have been

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successful if it were not for the UAW, which called a revote on the third agreement, falsely suggesting to workers that it was a legal requirement. At the same time, the union sought to sow confusion and demoralization by telling workers the contract would remain in effect and the strike ended regardless of their vote.

"Doing the whole second vote was BS," another Volvo worker told the WSWS. "They did it just so they could lie to people about that 'impasse' and carry 11 percent of the 'no' votes to the 'yes' column. The International was the biggest culprit of all, with our [local] officials working with them."

The UAW's real attitude towards the "democratic process" and workers' rights—utter contempt—is exemplified by the fact that it claims 17 votes, a margin of 0.3 percent, are sufficient to ratify its deal with the company, but hundreds of votes and a 60 percent margin were not sufficient to reject it.

Wednesday's vote, conducted in bad faith by the UAW, is the culmination of a strategy executed by the union since at least the start of the year aimed at securing the company's terms and suppressing workers' demands.

However, the UAW did not expect the breadth and intensity of workers' resistance to its agreement with the company. Even though most workers were only ever given carefully crafted "highlights" by the union, it was nonetheless clear that the agreements substantially raise health care costs, put a question mark over retiree health care, keep raises for top pay below inflation, and rebrand the multitier wage and benefit system as a multiyear "wage progression."

Seeing that it could not quickly overcome workers' resistance during two contract votes in May and June, the UAW moved to starve and isolate strikers, keeping them on just $275 a week in strike pay. The UAW engaged in a news blackout, leaving workers in the dark about the content of negotiations and not even informing other autoworkers that the strike was taking place.

In the final analysis, striking Volvo workers, who demonstrated immense courage and determination for months, have not been defeated by the company; they have been betrayed by the UAW. It can be certain that both the company and the UAW will now set out to impose conditions of workplace dictatorship for returning strikers, seeking to victimize and root out the workers who have displayed the greatest militancy.

In an indication of the pro-corporate character of the deal and Volvo's satisfaction at seemingly securing it, New River Valley General Manager Franky Marchand issued a statement cited by the Associated Press late Wednesday, saying the contract would allow the "company to secure the plant's long-term growth and sustainability."

In words that should be taken as warning by workers of the brutal speedup and work regime planned, he continued, "Our focus now will be on getting trucks to customers as quickly as we can, and strengthening our relationship with our employees."

However, the struggle at Volvo is far from over. Already it bears vitally important lessons for workers everywhere.

First, the strike itself emerged as part of a growing movement against demands by the corporations and their adjuncts in the trade unions to enforce new concessions and block workers' efforts to substantially raise pay, with a series of overwhelming contract rejections taking place this year at Warrior Met Coal in Alabama, at mining giant Vale's operations in Canada, and most recently at Frito-Lay's plant in Topeka, Kansas, among others.

Second, the treacherous role of the UAW is an undeniable refutation of all those political tendencies among the pseudo-left that claim that the trade unions represent the working class. In its efforts to carry out the company's will, the UAW has further exposed the role of the trade union executives, who serve as corporate bagmen, hostile to workers' interests.

Third, and thus far unique among recent struggles among industrial workers, is that the opposition at Volvo has taken on a highly conscious and organized form with the formation of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The statements and actions of the committee have given voice to the determination and aspirations of workers at the New River Valley factory. They have inspired workers not just at the plant, but at Mack Trucks and auto plants in the US, and beyond to Volvo workers in Belgium and Australia and other workers internationally.

To carry forward and unify the struggles which are already emerging and are yet to come, it is even more urgent to build the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee and expand the network of workers' rank-and-file organizations throughout the world.

Volvo workers can contact the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee at volvowrfc@gmail.com or by text to (540) 307-0509.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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