

Wife of Amcor worker in Terre Haute, Indiana expresses solidarity with Volvo workers, details betrayal by SEIU

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The following message of solidarity from Terre Haute, Indiana was sent to the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee who shared it with the World Socialist Web Site.

The letter relates the experiences of workers at Amcor in Terre Haute who recently had a sellout contract imposed in a completely undemocratic manner by their union, Workers United Local 1426, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union.

Amcor is an Australian-based packaging company. It took over the Terre Haute plant from Bemis in 2019.

“I am the wife of an Amcor Terre Haute employee. He was employed there during the strike of 2009, and we remember what a toll this event took on our family. The strike lasted approximately three months and in the end, the [Workers United] union eventually accepted a contract that was almost as bad as the first one proposed.

“When it was time to renegotiate in 2021, we were very nervous because it was well into the month of June without word from the company on a proposal, and the contract expired at 11:00 p.m. on June 30. Finally, we heard from Amcor. Unlimited overtime, no holiday pay, no premium weekend pay, open-ended medical premiums, temp workers allowed, and slashed pensions. The union set a time to sit down and try to talk to the company.

“The company was six hours late getting to the meeting. That was seen by the union as a big ‘F you!’ Signs were hung up in the break rooms at Amcor by the company reminding the workers how hard the strike of 2009 was, and that they would be better off to accept the contract than to be on a picket line. They did everything in their power to try to scare the union workers.

“Two of three Amcor Human Resources employees quit at this time. They walked out due to their working conditions and the toll it was taking on them.

“Bargaining began at that time. The union officials reminded Amcor that the employees helped them make record profits during a pandemic, all while the company slashed their workforce. Amcor refused to show their profit margins from 2020, stating that they didn't have to since they weren't claiming financial hardship. They flat out refused to show how much money the current employees had made them during the coronavirus pandemic.

“A contract was proposed, but it was voted down almost unanimously by the employees. The union gave Amcor a two-day extension to amend the contract before the workers walked out. Another contract was then proposed with a \$1,000 enticement bonus (really?), but again, it was voted down by the workers. We waited. The workers that were on duty at the time were ready to walk out that night at 11:00 p.m.

“Then all of a sudden, they were told that a contract had been accepted by the union and we were to keep working. What contract? What did we accept? To this day, we have never seen this contract. We were just told that it was the same as the second proposed contract, except with a \$1,500 bonus.

“Our hearts sank, and we couldn't believe that the union would sell us out like that. They literally pulled the rug out from under our feet. How could this have happened? We were sent a link to a YouTube video for explanation. The link is: <https://youtu.be/VfDi3zZwEAU>

“Then the truth came out. Mike Hoagland, the retired International Union President, had sent an email to the company officials stating that he would help them find workers to cross the picket line and keep their production at functioning levels if a strike occurred. My husband saw this email with his own two eyes. Company officials on the floor who sympathized with the workers were more than happy to share the email sent by Mr. Hoagland. One

of the company officials told the workers that he had to go into a classroom of approximately 150 people and instruct them on how and when they were going to cross the picket line. He said the people were from other Amcor plants that had been enticed with money and gifts to do this.

“So Amcor was basically willing to spend thousands of dollars to put people up in hotels and give them monetary gifts and extra pay, instead of giving this money to their current Terre Haute employees. Another ‘F you’ to my husband and his coworkers. All of this was never mentioned by the [international] union in their YouTube video.

“It came to light afterwards that Mr. Hoagland and the former local union president, Kirk Smith, did not get along and Mr. Hoagland did what he did due to this hatred. The third company Human Resources employee then quit. Many workers in my husband's department quit also at this time. The union made us look weak and sold us out. They do not have our backs, and their greed goes even further than the company that they are trying to fight.

“I support your cause and want you to know that our hearts are with you! Corporate greed has to end. I have had many people say to me ‘The unions were needed back in the early coal mining days when the working conditions were unsafe, but they aren't needed any more.’

“I disagree! Unions ARE needed more than ever, to fight the unfair conditions of today. However, the unions are making conditions worse for the workers because of their personal agendas. As workers, forming a fair union of the people, by the people, and for the people, is extraordinary! Fight the good fight, and remember that there is power in numbers. Bless you on your journey and remember that there are common, ordinary, everyday people like my husband and I that are keeping you in our thoughts.”



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