

Anger persists among Volvo workers following UAW claims of narrow contract ratification

Marcus Day
16 July 2021

Anger continues to simmer among Volvo workers at the New River Valley plant in southwestern Virginia following the United Auto Workers union's declaration Wednesday night that a re-vote of a contract workers had rejected last week resulted in ratification by a margin of just 17 ballots.

Many workers have responded with accusations of ballot fraud and calls for a recount, which the UAW has thus far met with total silence. The re-vote on a third tentative agreement between the UAW and Volvo had been called by the union in defiance of workers' previous rejection of the very same deal just a few days earlier by 60 percent.

The UAW campaigned for the deal and falsely presented it as if workers had no alternative but to accept it, a Volvo worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "Volvo knew exactly how to get what they wanted. Our union didn't do s**t. Matt [Blondino, Local 2069 president] only explained what would happen if you voted yes. He never gave an explanation of what we could do if we voted no. Just said it could take months or years. So he pushed for the 'yes' vote. It's BS."

The UAW headquarters issued a statement Wednesday night hailing the outcome while grossly distorting both the content of the agreement and the union's role in working with the company to force it through. It wrote that the six-year contract "includes elimination of the second tier; health care premiums protected for the life of the agreement; provides protections around shift scheduling and plant operations; as well as providing a major signing bonus and aggressive annual wage improvements every year of the agreement."

Contradicting these and other UAW claims of "major gains," a number of workers have taken to Facebook with bitter complaints about what the contract will entail. One worker wrote, "I'm never going to reach top pay, the new hires are never going to reach top pay. The tier system isn't going away. Those of us with a family can't afford a \$4,000 deductible. Absentees got screwed again. We lost the best

point system we had. No COLA [cost-of-living adjustments], no pensions, no bonuses. Looks like the company came out on top. Next contract no one will have anything to vote for because it's all gone."

Others have denounced the contract's treatment of retirees, who have seen promises by the company and the UAW that they would be provided full health coverage repeatedly broken. "Not happy as a retiree," another worker commented. "Guess I'm now looking for full time work to fund my families' insurance..."

Even as the UAW has moved rapidly to end the strike, shutting down pickets within minutes of the ratification announcement Wednesday night and telling workers they could return to work the next day, the union and company's economic blackmail of workers has continued.

Workers are demanding Local 2069 officials explain why their health insurance had not yet been reinstated as of Friday, despite reassurances by Local President Matt Blondino that it would be restored by the company on Thursday. "I thought the insurance was supposed to be back on today," one worker commented. "As of right now we still do not have coverage." Another wrote, "I tried to pick up a prescription at 6:45 this evening and was told I do not have any coverage. The [health insurance] App says my coverage is inactive too!"

An admin for the Local 2069 page replied lamely, "My understanding is that it takes about 24 hours for Anthem [the insurance provider] to get us all back in once they've been advised. It is effective today but I'd say personally it will take a few days for them to get it all up and running."

Other workers voiced indignation after the local announced that the final strike check, still a measly \$275 for a week, would not be available until July 26, more than a week and a half after the conclusion of the strike. "Why can't they pay two checks in one like the last one?" one asked. "That is for the ones that are owed two checks!! Some will be out of town that week since we are off!!!"

With the UAW providing crucial assistance to the company in its effort to impose its contract, both Volvo and the UAW will now likely seek to victimize returning workers and enforce brutal speed-up in order to make up for lost production.

However, Volvo workers' courageous struggle against both the company and the UAW has continued to inspire workers confronting similar problems throughout the US and elsewhere. The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which has led the opposition to the company-UAW attacks, shared a letter with the WSWS sent to it by the wife of a worker at packaging goods maker Amcor in Terre Haute, Indiana, where a union affiliated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) recently unilaterally imposed a contract despite workers' opposition.

"The union made us look weak and sold us out," the letter states. "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!"

A temporary worker at the General Motors Flint Assembly plant in Michigan told the WSWS, "I am angered and heartbroken over the union calling this vote. And I just have a very hard time believing that it passed. Even if it did, the workers made it clear that the majority wanted a better deal, a fair deal. I encourage the Volvo workers to use every resource they have at hand and continue the fight."

A Daimler Truck worker in North Carolina also spoke to the WSWS on the situation at Volvo, saying he believes "the UAW is in bed with the company."

"I've been keeping up with [WSWS coverage] daily, and [the situation at Volvo] is really disappointing. Ray Curry actually came out of our plant. I worked with him on second shift for 10 years and I watched him grow as he went through the ranks of the UAW, and he's not the same Ray Curry that I knew.

"I never thought I would see the day when the company would decide what the last and final offer is. That's basically what the UAW did with Volvo.

"It's really upsetting to me that the UAW would even consider taking contracts like they offered Volvo and like they offered us. They told us this was our best and final offer and that we better take it.

"They show you highlights, just what they want you to see to get you to vote 'yes.' They're not going to show their hand.

"We had one of our company officials come in and she asked how we're doing, and a coworker told her, 'Everything's good, but I have a question for you: how come the company doesn't offer a thirty-and-out retirement package?' and her response was, 'We're not in the

retirement business, we're in the truck-building business.'"

A worker at the Macungie Volvo Mack Trucks plant in Pennsylvania expressed his support for the strike, stating that it was "not right" that the walkout had been ended. The worker declared that the requirement that new hires progress for a six-year period "really stinks."

"Who even knows if that facility will be there after six years," he said, noting that the semiconductor chip shortage has particularly affected the truck industry. "I've never been to the New River Valley facility before, but it is bigger than Macungie's plant and has more work going to it. If workers don't receive full pay sooner, there's going to be a lot of people leaving that work in search of something more stable that pays better.

"The UAW people down there should be removed from their office and kicked out of the union," he said. "NRV just set a precedent" with the forcing through of an unpopular contract offer. "What are we [at Mack] going to see in two years? What about Ford, General Motors and the rest of us?"

The worker stated his agreement with the need to form independent rank-and-file committees in every facility to oppose the impending onslaught.

Members of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee and the rank-and-file solidarity committee formed at Mack Trucks Allentown plant told the WSWS on Friday that they hoped workers draw the necessary conclusions about the role of the UAW and the need expand the committees in order to carry on the fight.

"This has pretty much peeled back the skin on the union. I hope the people have seen how they are now, and help Mack workers and other workers prepare for their struggles," a member of the VWRFC said.

A member of the rank-and-file solidarity committee at the Mack Trucks Allentown plant added, "If they can't get COLA or health insurance or other gains, then it's time for the working class to move on from the UAW. The company and the union, they've shown what they've done, and I'm not willing to forgive them for that."

The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee urges Volvo and Mack workers to join and build the committee. Contact the committee by email at volvowrfc@gmail.com or by text at (540) 307-0509.



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