

Virtual standoff at Volvo Trucks as workers oppose speedup on first full workday after five-week strike

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Volvo Trucks workers reported that very little if any production took place at the New River Valley (NRV) plant in Dublin, Virginia, on Monday, the first full day back on the job after the conclusion of a five-week strike by nearly 3,000 workers. Workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* described a virtual standoff between workers and Volvo management, which is seeking to make up production lost during the walkout.

Returning workers also had angry confrontations with officials from United Auto Workers Local 2069 Monday. Local officials had worked with the UAW International to force a revote last week on a third tentative agreement which nearly two-thirds of the workers had rejected days earlier. The UAW claimed the contract passed by only 17 votes Wednesday and immediately shut down the strike.

On the third shift on Sunday night and the day shift on Monday, some of the trucks already on the assembly line were finished, but no new vehicles came out of Station One, where truck cabs are welded and assembled, workers told the WSW. “A lot of the workers were in a foul mood over the contract passing, and the operators of those machines can pretty much dictate everything,” one worker said.

“Everybody’s mad,” another worker said. “People are talking to each other and figuring out what the hell just happened to us and how much we are going to lose in out-of-pocket health care expenses and whatever else is in the contract that the UAW has not told us. It’s awful what they did to us, both the union and the company. I’ve heard more hatred toward the UAW for selling us out than talk against the company.

“The day started with management reading a supervisor’s talking points about how with missing parts and the strike this is going to be a rough year,” the worker continued. “They were hoping to get us back into the

plants two or three weeks ago. It’s a standoff.

“They are trying to ramp up output, but they didn’t get anything going production-wise. People are working on a few trucks here and there, and we can see they were hit by the impact of the strike. You can see trucks on the line that have paperwork on them that is curling because they were sitting in the sun for more than a month. Some are coming off the line, but not like it was. They also have a lot of older guys retiring after the strike and don’t have a lot of people.”

The worker added that construction on the new plant and other upgrades to NRV had continued during the strike, despite earlier claims to the contrary by the company. On the eve of the July 9 vote on the third tentative agreement, Volvo management tried to bully workers into voting for the UAW-backed deal by claiming that it had “already cancelled the investment that would have moved cab trim into Plant” and that the strike was increasing the “risk of future investment being rejected...”

“The construction workers and subcontractors didn’t miss a day,” the worker told the WSW. “What management said was all lies, lies and lies.”

Another worker reported that workers on Sunday night’s third shift confronted a UAW Local 2069 representative on the bargaining committee. “The third shift rep has been in hiding and this is the first time we’ve seen him inside the plant since early January. When he showed his face, everybody tore into him. He was on the bargaining committee, and he told us the UAW contacted Volvo for a revote on the third tentative agreement (TA3). Volvo did not contact the UAW. He said that the UAW was worried that Volvo was going to stick to the last offer/final offer and then no one would come out good. So, Volvo agreed to let the UAW have a revote on TA3. I

guess they felt they needed to throw out threats and bullying to try to get it passed,” the worker said.

In other words, the UAW feared that Volvo’s unilateral announcement that it was imposing its “last, best and final” offer, just days after workers decisively rejected it, could provoke an explosion by workers against both the company and the UAW. In the eyes of UAW President Ray Curry and the rest of the top executives of the UAW, such a rebellion could also trigger an expansion of the strike to other Volvo operations, including Mack Trucks plants in Pennsylvania and Maryland, where workers were already eager to support the strike by refusing to handle scab parts from NRV.

Under these conditions, the UAW contacted Volvo management about holding a revote on the rejected contract to give the company a cover to impose the deal anyway. This was accompanied by a campaign of lies that the UAW was under some kind of legal obligation to hold another vote. At the same time, the UAW made it clear that it would suspend the strike and allow the company to impose the deal even if workers rejected it again.

“I’ve told other workers I don’t have problem with Volvo and with Franky [Marchand, the plant manager],” another worker told the WWS. “They did their jobs. I have a problem with the union and the UAW leadership, which pushed this junk on us and sold us out.”

Another worker added, “Most of the workers said they wouldn’t put it past the UAW to work with Volvo on the ‘last, best and final’ business. The UAW rep admitted that the few extra dollars the UAW agreed to give the workers that hired in between 2011 and 2015 was going to mean \$190,000 a month in extra union dues for the UAW. Meanwhile, there is a worker whose son has come to work here, and he brought in his first paycheck from the 1990s. He started out making \$15 an hour in the 90s, virtually the exact same thing, except maybe a dollar less than his son is making today, even with all the inflation over the last 30 years.

“Some people say the UAW can just get away with this, but the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee showed we could fight them and now we have to continue the fight,” the worker said.

Unlike countless previous struggles betrayed by the UAW, during this year’s Volvo strike, workers had a new voice and leadership in the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), which exposed the lies of the UAW. The VWRFC advanced a strategy to break through the UAW’s isolation of the strike, appealing for the mobilization of Mack Truck workers, autoworkers in

Detroit and other cities and Volvo workers in Belgium, Australia, Canada, and other countries.

In a statement issued Sunday night, the VWRFC drew the lessons of the months-long struggle. It stated that the “UAW represents the companies, not the workers, and no amount of pressure will change that. Far from responding to our overwhelming rejection of their deals with Volvo by reversing course and working to achieve our demands, the UAW instead reacted by doubling down on its information blackout and deepening its conspiracy with the company, which culminated in the assistance it provided Volvo in getting the third TA implemented through the revote last week.”

It continued, “While the UAW has shown it is not capable of meeting our needs, that does not diminish or remove the necessity of a collective, rank-and-file organization of workers to defend and fight for our interests. The Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee fought throughout the struggle to unify all workers, to give voice to the needs of all the generations, to combat the lies of Volvo and the UAW and to find the path to win the strike.”

The statement concluded with a call to action: “To Volvo workers at NRV, we say: The fight continues. Opposition and anger are inevitably going to reignite as the full reality of this new contract comes to light, and as the company tries to enforce speedup to make up for lost production. We appeal to you to join our committee and help us build it as the organization which will lead the struggles still to come.”

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



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