

# Valley Labor Report radio program falsifies record of Volvo strike, denounces rank-and-file committees

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Last week, the *World Socialist Web Site* noted the near complete silence of the pseudo-left press and political organizations on the Volvo Strike in Dublin, Virginia, where autoworkers rebelled against the United Auto Workers' sabotage of their struggle.

For the pseudo-left, whether and how they report on something follows a class logic. Speaking for privileged layers of the middle class, including many union officials and staffers, they are motivated above all by opposition to a movement of the working class that escapes the straitjackets of the unions and the Democratic Party.

This not only accounts for their silence on the strike. It also means, to the extent that they do acknowledge its existence, they are compelled to falsify what took place.

Such was the case with Saturday's Valley Labor Report, "Volvo Strike Debrief, Hope for the PRO Act." The report was led by Jacob Morrison, secretary-treasurer of the North Alabama AFL-CIO and former Programs Director for the Alabama Campus Democrats. Morrison's co-host was David Story, president of the International Association of Machinists Local 44.

Morrison began by complaining about the lack of media coverage of the strike, stating that "almost every single article on the strike [in the media] does not explain at all what these workers grievances are." He added, "And Labor Notes has been basically the only place that really went into detail about it. So read Labor Notes is what I'm trying to say."

Thus, Morrison begins by writing out one of the essential factors in the strike, namely the role of the *World Socialist Web Site*, which assisted workers in the development of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

As an objective matter, the "only place" for information on the strike was the WSW. Labor Notes has written a grand total of two articles on the strike. By contrast, the WSW, by the time the segment aired, had published 112 articles.

If one wanted to discover the grievances of rank-and-file workers, one would look in vain at Labor Notes, which interviewed only a single worker during the strike. The VWRFC wrote 10 statements placing demands on both UAW Local 2069 and the UAW International, and appealing for broad international support for the strike. This was supplemented by countless interviews with workers outside of the committee, which the WSW published daily.

While ignoring the WSW and the VWRFC, the entire purpose of the podcast was in fact to try to counter the influence of both and maintain the organizational stranglehold of the UAW.

In their account, the co-hosts soften the brutal and anti-democratic

methods through which the UAW forced the contract through. Asking rhetorically "what changed" that led workers to support the fourth agreement, Morrison mouthed some mild criticism of the "lack of support and lack of transparency" by the UAW, which he calls "very unfortunate." The sellout of the strike, he claims, was due to "weak leadership."

In fact, the UAW actively and systematically collaborated with the company for months to force through a sellout contract against the opposition of workers, having them vote on essentially the same agreement four times until workers "got it right." This was not an issue of "weak leadership," but a deliberate scabbing operation against their own membership.

The UAW was able to engineer a return to work this week only by forcing workers to vote again on a contract that they had rejected only days before. Under dubious circumstances and widespread suspicions among rank-and-file workers of ballot rigging (which Morrison completely ignores), the union claimed the contract passed in the re-vote by 17 votes.

Morrison and Story make even these milquetoast criticisms of the UAW, however, only to provide it with cover for the main point of the segment: under no conditions can workers organize themselves independently of the UAW.

"There are going to be some people who criticize the unions and say: 'You need to throw away your union card and you need to form a rank-and-file committee.' [Laughs]," Morrison said. "The question I would have for people like that is, 'How is it easier to organize rank-and-file people without a union contract in place to protect workers for organization?' Even if the protection a union offers is minimal, in what scenario are you better off without a union?"

In reality, the Volvo strike was a practical demonstration that, in order to mobilize their collective strength, workers must organize themselves independently of the UAW. What made the Volvo strike itself so significant, and why the pseudo-left has responded to it with a stony silence, is that workers began to do this.

At any rate, Morrison's claim that the WSW advocates that workers immediately leave the union is a falsification of the role and function of rank-and-file committees, which embrace broad layers of workers, including those who hold out hope that the union can be reformed, but who agree on the need for workers to seize the initiative out of the hands of the union apparatus.

Indeed, the VWRFC in the course of the strike issued multiple open letters to top UAW officials demanding an explanation of their strategy for the strike. This included the demand that the union use its

\$800 million strike fund for its ostensible purpose, by tripling strike pay to \$750 per week, rather than allowing it to be used as a piggy bank for the bureaucracy.

Here, it is worth pointing out that Morrison has specifically attacked the WSWS's demand that the United Mine Workers increase its strike pay for coal miners at Warrior Met, calling it "clueless" and claiming that it would "liquidate" the organization. In fact, the UMWA, which has only a few thousand active coal miners remaining and had not called a strike since 2007, controls over \$200 million in assets, which, like the UAW, are spent financing the lifestyles of its bloated staff and officialdom.

While mouthing vague and limited criticisms of the union, Morrison and Story turn reality upside down, portraying the relationship of the UAW and Volvo as adversarial and not collaborative. The "fact that the bosses are so anti-union should give the pause" to anyone who is inclined to organize outside of the UAW, Morrison says.

The term "union" is here incorrectly applied to the UAW, an organization which suppresses strikes and enforces concessions. In fact, Volvo's position was pro-UAW and anti-worker. They could not have shut down the strike without the critical assistance rendered by the UAW, which fought tooth and nail to prevent a strike from occurring at all. The corporatist conspiring by the UAW against the workers was so shameless that one local official even admitted to workers that the decision to force a re-vote was the union's, not the company's.

In May, GM publicly announced that it supported efforts by the UAW to "organize" workers at two battery plants in Ohio and Tennessee, citing the UAW's "historic and constructive relationship in the automotive industry."

The rank-and-file committee is independent of the pro-corporate UAW, so that workers can organize their own struggle.

Morrison's co-host David Story descended into the nonsensical in order to present the UAW as a force to oppose the company. "Don't give into that bosses' wish," he said. "They're hoping that number one they get a contract that favors the company, but number two that if it does favor the company enough workers will see that and be pissed and abandon the union, which just means the next contract will be even more in the company's favor."

He concludes: "Don't give into that temptation. It is a real thing and certainly hard to avoid those emotions in the midst of a heated loss. It happens. The thing about the unions is that there is democratic accountability to working people."

Story's argument is absurd. The company relied upon the UAW to force through the agreement, refuting his claim of "democratic accountability" by ignoring and running roughshod over the demands of workers themselves. Why would management want to rid itself of an organization that was instrumental in enforcing its interests?

The American auto industry has relied on the UAW for decades to force through plant closures, layoffs, wages and benefit cuts and other concessions which have reduced what was once among the highest-paid sections of the working class to a largely low-wage workforce. In return, the UAW has received billions of dollars in corporate cash through mechanisms such as joint union-management training centers and direct control of corporate stock.

The bureaucrats that control the UAW derive their income and privileges from their continued ability to deliver such concessions. This is why it responded to repeated contract rejections at Volvo, not by submitting to "democratic accountability," à la Story, but by redoubling its campaign to run roughshod over the demands of

workers.

The union's own reputation with its real constituency—the auto companies—was at stake. It is to management, not the workers, that the UAW feels "accountable."

If they should not form rank-and-file committees, what does Morrison suggest that Volvo workers do in the aftermath of the strike? In the show, he offered only a handful of piecemeal reform measures such as the implementation of "open bargaining," which will do nothing to change the social character of the union or its policies.

The WSWS has analyzed this proposal recently, which entails workers participating in sessions under the discipline of the union bureaucracy, which retains the right to throw out "troublemakers." It is being proposed by various pseudo-left groups as both a means of providing a "democratic" gloss to virtually the same sellout contracts, and as a means of self-enrichment for small armies of consultants and union staffers brought in to implement them.

But for Story, even Morrison's proposals for such mild reforms go too far. Open bargaining "can be scary for folks who are used to doing it a certain way," he said. There are "good union people who would be hesitant" to participate in bargaining, based on "my experience on a bargaining team." He also sought to blackguard workers as potential "snitches" in the bargaining process. The argument is aimed at framing any effort by workers to organize independently of the UAW as part of a management conspiracy.

Morrison, too, has a history of attempting to shift blame from the backs of the union bureaucracy onto workers. This May, he was compelled to personally intervene to break up a racist assault by high-ranking officials from the United Mine Workers of America against young socialists whom they mistakenly believed were from the WSWS. But in the aftermath of the assault, Morrison falsified his accounting of the incident, transferring blame from the bureaucracy onto the rank-and-file by claiming the attack had been carried out only by "UMWA members."

The Valley Labor Report segment was an exercise in evasions and falsifications aimed at preventing workers from learning anything from the Volvo Strike. The *World Socialist Web Site*, on the other hand, calls upon workers around the world to carefully study the strike and draw the necessary conclusions from this critical strategic experience.



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