

“It is the lack of communication that keeps the UAW bureaucracy in power. But knowledge is power”: Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee leader sends message of support to autoworkers

Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee
17 September 2023

Sign up for text message updates on the Detroit Big Three contract fight by texting AUTO to (866) 847-1086.

The following message was sent by Larry, a leader of the Volvo Trucks Rank-and-File Committee, to Sunday’s meeting, “Unite the rank and file for an all-out strike,” sponsored by the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Committees Network. The Volvo workers’ committee was formed during the three-month-struggle by nearly 3,000 workers at the New River Valley plant in Dublin, Virginia, in 2021.

Workers at the Big Three auto companies set the bar for the rest of us. During our struggle two years ago, the UAW officials kept telling us, you can’t have COLA [cost-of-living adjustment raises] and other things, because the autoworkers don’t have that. If you can hold the line and defeat the tier system, years of stagnant wages and the empty promises of the UAW bureaucrats—you will win for all of us.

Fain is trying to placate autoworkers while he works with the companies to put the screws to us. If the UAW had cajones, every UAW local in the country would be out on strike now. If that is going to happen, the local rank-and-file committees have to build up the pressure for an all-out strike.

What Fain is doing is a lot like what the UAW executives did to us in 2021. Knowing they would not be able to get a contract through without allowing some limited job action, the UAW called us out on April 17, 2021. Two weeks later, they suddenly shut the strike

down and ordered us to return to work without showing us or letting us vote on their tentative agreement. This allowed Volvo to put out more trucks and replenish its stocks.

We voted down the deal by 91 percent. Three weeks later, they brought back another one and we rejected it by 90 percent. The UAW called us out on strike again. But they did everything to isolate, starve us and defeat us. Despite this, we voted down their third deal. The UAW officials responded by making us vote again on what they said was the last, best, and final offer from the company. This time they claimed it passed by 17 votes.

Two years after the contract, workers know it was a mistake to vote for this rotten contract, and there is deep animosity toward the UAW and the company.

During our three-month fight, we organized the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee to provide a new perspective to workers and open their eyes to a different story from the one the UAW officials were giving them. That made workers question the higher authority. The UAW officials pushed back and tried to discredit us, but our voices were being heard. Workers would say: we heard what the company said, and what the UAW said, but now we want to see what the rank-and-file committee said. We gave workers a way to fight. They would ask, “Can we really do that?” and we said, “Yes, if we stick together and don’t let them divide us.”

It was great that other committees sprang up during

our fight, like the one Will Lehman joined at Mack Trucks. The UAW intentionally divides Volvo and Mack workers even though we work for the same company and pits us against each other. We talked with Will and others and said we shouldn't be competing against each other, we're in the same fight. We did not realize this until we started talking to each other.

It is the lack of communication that keeps the UAW bureaucracy in power. The apparatus wants to keep everyone in the dark. But knowledge is power.

We also talked with workers outside the US, to Volvo workers in Belgium, and autoworkers in Mexico. We realized we were in the same battle, and they were supporting us. All you ever hear from the UAW is that workers overseas don't care about the US workers, that they are told that we are greedy. But through the committee, we found out that they were rooting for us, and that felt good. We talked to the Mexican workers, and they were looking to us to fight the companies, because if we could make our lives better, it would improve theirs. All of us are in this together. It is not just about American workers, it is about workers around the world, fighting together.

GM, Ford and Stellantis workers: you are the shining light on the hill. If you can stick together, everything you win will roll down the hill to us and workers everywhere. But you have to build these committees. None of these politicians, Democrats or Republicans, are our friends. We have to take power in our own hands, so when the UAW bureaucrats say you have to go to work while less than 10 percent of you are striking, the ranks will say "No, we're all going out."



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact