

Solidarity action supporting Swedish Tesla strike spreads across Nordic region

By our correspondents
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On Wednesday, dock workers in Finland and Norway began a blockade of Tesla goods, refusing to transport cars for the American electric vehicles manufacturer during a strike of hundreds of mechanics at Tesla maintenance workshops in Sweden. This has been accompanied by similar action by dockers and lorry drivers in Denmark, which issued notification over a fortnight ago.

Swedish Tesla workers, IF Metall union members, walked out on October 27 to demand a collective agreement rejected by the company. This originally involved 130 workers but has expanded since December to 500 across 17 workshops according to *Nordic Labour Journal* (NLJ). Tesla does not have a production facility in Sweden, but operates a network of service centres.

According to the *NLJ*, employees of Tesla in Norway are judged on a five-point scale and to achieve high marks they are expected to work overtime without compensation. Those taking sick leave risk losing their jobs. A similar system of arbitrarily fixing pay to productivity by managers operates in Sweden, according to the account of a mechanic taking part in the strike provided to *Dagens Nyheter* (DN). They also explained, “No one knows the working hours or work environment act. Managers do not have a clue of which chemicals we work with and no risk assessment.”

The stand taken by Tesla workers has led to sympathy action from a broad cross section of other Swedish workers including dockers, postal workers, cleaners and electricians with boycotts of supplies and services to halt the operations of the company.

The strike action by Swedish mechanics is the first Tesla has ever confronted across global operations which employ around 120,000 workers. Elon Musk, its billionaire owner and richest man in the world with a

net wealth of \$250 billion, denounced the action stating last month on X, which he owns, “This is insane.”

Tesla has filed two separate lawsuits against the Swedish Transport Agency and PostNord AM seeking to outlaw secondary action by postal workers who refused to deliver vehicle license plates to the company. One court found in favour of the company while another rejected its claim of interim security measures, with a final verdict yet to be decided.

Earlier this month dockers in the Swedish Transport Workers Union expanded their boycott of handling Tesla parts and cars to all ports in Sweden, after launching the action at four locations, Malmö, Södertälje, Gothenberg and Trelleborg, on November 7.

To counteract the sympathy strikes across Sweden and disruption to its operations, Tesla continued to import its cars overland after unloading them in neighbouring countries. In opposition to this dock and transport workers in Denmark, Norway and Finland all announced earlier this month that they would take sympathy action.

On December 5, Danish dockers and transport workers in 3F Transport announced that they would refuse to handle Tesla cars. In Norway the biggest private sector union, Fellesforbundet (United Federation of Trade Unions) stated that it would join the sympathy action on the docks on December 20, as did the Finnish Transport Workers Union (AKT). In the case of the AKT, this was described as a precautionary move as Tesla vehicles are not normally transported through Finland but could be re-routed because of the blockade by Scandinavian dockers.

IG Metall in Germany, which has members in Tesla’s largest production facility in Europe, southeast of Berlin, ruled out joining the solidarity action stating to

Swedish newspaper *DN*, “That would be illegal. You strike for your own business, for your own wages. A political strike would mean violating the duty to work, and then the employer could take action against the employees.”

The plant in Grunheide employs around 11,000 workforce manufacturing batteries and Model Y SUVs, where Tesla opened its first European gigafactory in 2022, according to *Associated Press*.

IG Metall has given a small glimpse of the intolerable conditions of car workers in the plant. It is presiding over “occupational health” and has fielded reports from “numerous employees” about accidents and health problems that resulted in “high staff sickness rates.”

This atrocious treatment of workers is accepted by the union bureaucracy rather than risk the development of unified action that would give Tesla workers a sense of their social power, undermining IG Metall’s cozy relations with the corporation and government. This is only the most graphic expression of the dead hand of the bureaucratic apparatus which must be lifted to take forward the fight against Tesla.

While workers are determined to fight for an agreement to overcome their conditions of super exploitation, the unions are more interested in convincing Tesla of the benefits of the “Nordic model.” This is the corporatist mechanism in which the unions enforce the dictates of big business to curb workers demands on pay and conditions and insure employers against any explosive development of the class struggle. Large parts of the political and business establishment are concerned that the refusal by Musk to recognise the unions and the role of collective bargaining risks upsetting these essential relations.

The trade unions have made explicit appeals for Tesla to recognise the financial benefits of working in a corporatist relationship with them, especially in enforcing the mass job losses which will accompany the capitalist management of the transition to electric vehicles.

IndustriALL Europe, a federation of nearly 200 unions covering 50 million workers in the metal, chemical, mining and textile industries headed by IG Metall stated, “Tesla has much to gain by learning from the European social model and accepting unions as partners in the automotive transformation it has aimed to lead.”

The Danish *FriFagbevegelse* told reversing falling union membership “Not least... will benefit the businesses themselves.” The Norwegian Fellesforbundet told *FriFagbevegelse* it planned to invite the CEO of Tesla Norway to “review all the advantages and opportunities a collective agreement has for both employees and the business.”



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