

Virginia Volvo workers repudiate UAW-backed contract: “Now that we’ve rejected this, we should be back on strike”

Our reporter
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For information on joining the Volvo Rank-and-File Committee, email volvowrfc@gmail.com.

On Sunday workers at the Volvo Truck plant in Dublin, Virginia overwhelmingly voted to reject a sellout contract that the United Auto Workers had negotiated with the company after a two-week strike by 3,000 workers.

Workers were outraged that the UAW forced them to take down their picket lines on April 30 without even being given a chance to see the contract, let alone vote. Anger only grew after details of the agreement began leaking out. Workers formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee and campaigned against the sellout. Angry workers confronted UAW International Secretary Treasurer Ray Curry and other union officials, who claimed the deal was “the best they were going to get.”

Workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* were adamant that they would not accept substandard pay raises given the spike in the cost of living. “With the rate of inflation, a 3 percent raise is no raise at all,” a Volvo worker said. “Inflation is going to run rampant over the next five years. We need COLA (Cost of Living Adjustments) and real raises.

“Volvo is paying its shareholders big dividends. This job is paying \$18. You could go somewhere else for the wages and health care benefits they pay here, and we wouldn’t have to work 58 hours a week and kill ourselves. I’m warning the new guys about this 10-hour Alternative Work Schedule. It’s hard enough being on the assembly line for eight or nine hours. Now they are trying to break you with 10 hours.”

The worker said that only a resumption of the struggle, sabotaged by the UAW, could provide the workers with real gains.

“Now that we’ve rejected this, we should be back on strike. We need a long, drawn out strike. But the union is

not willing to do it. Local 2069 President Matt Blondino explicitly said the strike would not restart for at least another week. That means a week or two more of building trucks for these SOBs.”

Another worker pointed out the contradiction between the enormous financial resources controlled by the UAW and the pittance the union was handing out in strike support, \$275 a week.

“In the 1980s and 1990s, the UAW leaders voted to take 25 percent of the strike fund to use for whatever reason they wanted to. Then they changed it to 100 percent. I looked at the Labor Department filings; they spent \$750,000 on office equipment.”

He also described how the union is collaborating with Volvo to rob former workers of their hard-earned pensions and retiree health care coverage. “I keep telling workers, they want to get rid of pensions and retirement benefits entirely. The union and the company are working together with a third-party company that is supposed to be studying the area to see what retirees need and what they don’t. One of the UAW officials at the meeting Saturday said, ‘You’re going to be paying more co-pays for health care benefits whether we strike or not.’”

The worker referred to the so-called VEBA (Voluntary Employees Beneficiary Association) run by the UAW, which was initially funded by Volvo as part of a deal to relieve the company of its retiree health care obligations, saving the company millions of dollars. The deal was similar to trust funds set up by the Detroit automakers. “The money is coming out the UAW’s pocket now, instead of from the company. That’s why they are talking about workers paying higher premiums and co-pays. The union wants to cut their margins so they can make more money.”

He described how the UAW was collaborating with

Volvo to lower labor costs at the New River Valley plant in Virginia so that it could eventually phase out plants also owned by Volvo in Hagerstown, Maryland; Allentown, Pennsylvania and other locations which produce vehicles under the Mack-Volvo brand.

The deal, which workers just rejected, was even worse than the one imposed on Mack-Volvo workers after Ray Curry and the UAW sold out their strike in 2019. “Their insurance stayed the same, and the company payments to the 401 (K) are much higher.” He said workers at the New River Valley plant made copies of the Mack-Volvo contract and distributed them throughout the plant. “The next day workers talked, and everybody decided we had to vote this down.

“The new stamping plant here is going to be for Volvo and Volvo-Mack trucks. We’re cheaper labor down here, and if they got this contract passed, it would be used to get rid of the Mack plants in Maryland, Pennsylvania and other states. That’s why they were trying to shove this contract down our throats. They want even cheaper labor.”

The contract rejection by Volvo workers is another sign of a growing wave of militancy by workers, whose living standards have been devastated by decades of concessions contracts imposed by the unions. The vote at Volvo follows the massive contract rejection vote by Warrior Met coal miners in Alabama and continuing struggles by oil workers in Texas, steelworkers in Pennsylvania, nurses in Massachusetts and other struggles.

A united fight of all workers is needed, but this cannot be achieved through the UAW, which at Volvo has again demonstrated that it is a corrupt arm of management. To carry forward their fight we urge workers to join the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee and take part in the growing international network of rank-and-file committees.



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