

Deere workers wary of stall tactics by UAW, press for strike action

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In the wake of Sunday's 90 percent rejection of a sellout contract backed by the United Auto Workers (UAW), workers at agricultural equipment maker John Deere are standing guard against stall tactics by the union to prevent or delay a strike by the company's 10,100 workers. The UAW announced a strike deadline for Wednesday night at midnight when the vote results were announced.

The UAW-Deere contract would have included general wage increases of just 11-12 percent over six years, or roughly 2 percent per year, or a cut in real wages when taking inflation into account. Moreover, it would have terminated pensions for workers hired after November, adding a third tier of workers to the current hated two-tier system accepted by the UAW in 1997. The union presented this deal to Deere workers even as the company reported record profits, with Deere announcing \$1.6 billion in third-quarter profits alone, enough to give every UAW-Deere worker \$160,000.

With the strike deadline fast approaching, the UAW is enforcing a veil of silence over its plans, a clear indication that it is trying to work out a deal in the 11th hour to prevent a strike. One worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "I talked to a steward just now. Tomorrow is business as usual."

The contract rejection, the first by workers of a UAW-backed contract at Deere in 35 years, is part of a growing strike wave across the country and around the world. Within the United States, thousands of workers are already on strike, and tens of thousands more, including 24,000 nurses in California and 60,000 television and movie production workers, have authorized strike action.

The vote at Deere also follows an overwhelming contract rejection by workers at auto parts maker Dana, Inc., who rejected a contract pushed by the UAW and

United Steelworkers by 90 percent earlier this fall. The unions have responded at Dana by dragging out talks with the company as long as possible, while keeping workers on the job where seven-day, 80-hour workweeks are the norm.

The UAW and USW have already missed their deadline for a new contract, which had been October 10. However, after lengthy delays in negotiations over local contracts, discussions for the global agreement have reportedly only just started in recent days. The likely reason for this is not any bitter disagreements between union and management—in fact, no such disagreements exist—but over concern that the stand taken by Deere workers puts workers at Dana in an even more powerful position. Similar stalling tactics were used by the UAW earlier in the year to prevent graduate students at New York University from going on strike at the same time as graduate students a few miles away at Columbia.

If workers go on strike, the UAW will not begin paying strike benefits until the third week of striking. Even then, despite its nearly \$800 million strike fund, the UAW plans to starve workers on just \$275 a week, a pay rate that will leave workers impoverished.

To fight against the UAW's treachery, workers must continue to build up the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee to take the initiative out of the hands of the union bureaucrats. As the WSWs explained in a recent statement, this committee must coordinate "with rank-and-file strike committees at every Deere workplace [and] will provide a vital means for workers to share information and circumvent the censorship and news blackout of the UAW and enable them to develop and execute a strategy which proceeds from what workers need, not the company's profit interests."

Workers are determined to fight. A worker at Deere's

Atlanta parts distribution said, “If the international [UAW] refuses to let us strike, there will be a ton of backlash, or if they push this contract through without our voice being heard.”

One Deere retiree denounced the UAW's dirty tricks. “It's about time workers said ‘enough’ with the way previous contracts were thrown at us with very little knowledge of the fine print. I will admit that I was a pre-1997 employee and my wages and benefits were OK. What it really did was place a wedge between pre-97 and post-97 workers. The CIPP program [Deere's CIPP productivity improvement scheme—the Continuous Improvement Pay Plan] was not enforced the same in the different factories and supervisors altered plans at the Davenport factory to make sure it tripped at the semester. They also rammed things into CIPP without including it into the base.”

A retired Deere worker in Minneapolis said, “It's about time members pushed back at the UAW. They have been selling us out for years. I worked at the Minneapolis plant for 30 years and retired in 2003. Every contract was a sellout. I guess things haven't changed. You all have to ask yourself how much are the big dogs in the UAW getting paid under the table from John Deere management to sell us out.”

A retired worker at Volvo Trucks, where workers voted down three consecutive UAW-backed agreements and carried out a five-week strike over the summer, warned, “The UAW did the same thing to the people at Volvo and people fell for it. No one read the details but were given highlight sheets. They left the language out of the retirees contract and now I get a pension check of \$400 and change. The rest goes to cover insurance and benefits. All were guaranteed pay in previous contracts by the company. Tell these members to read and understand every word of this agreement or they will lose everything they have worked for.”

A Deere worker in Waterloo, Iowa stated, “Those UAW big wigs are orchestrating this corruption with more companies than just John Deere. These fat cats are screwing all agricultural manufacturing union employees and more. These same international UAW big dogs screwed Caterpillar on their last contract in 2017. They weren't allowed to strike and they were forced to take the first offer that was given to them.

“I heard before I left work today that Deere told the

UAW International [there would be] no new proposal. They aren't afraid of us UAW folks striking. They said they will lock us out at 11:59.”

The worker continued, “The union is going to starve us out on strike pay, and the company knows that, but they can't f*** with me. I'm ready for this. I've saved up. I want us blue collar folks to put the hurt on their shareholders. Deere's stock has already dropped 12 points since our ‘no’ vote. If you have a million shares like Bill Gates has, that adds up substantially. I want to crush them financially so badly because of their arrogance.”

An Ottumwa Deere production worker added, “I truly don't believe the company or International understands how intolerant we have become to their excuses and games. I think they have greatly underestimated just how bonded we are in solidarity and how truly fed up we are.

“They want a fight? They will get one! For the last 18 months, we have suffered and sacrificed through a pandemic and that has conditioned us for what may come. If our demands aren't met, we won't budge. Any tentative contract short of what we asked for simply won't pass, and if they think that they will pull together a Hail Mary contract before midnight then that will be nothing but a stall tactic, a mere attempt at getting an extension so they can continue to suck productivity off of us while trying to stab us in our backs.”



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