

John Deere lays off another 287 workers as Bernie Sanders seeks to place blame on foreign workers

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Last Wednesday, John Deere, the largest agricultural machinery company in the world, announced yet another round of layoffs, this time impacting 287 workers in the Quad Cities, including 80 in Davenport, Iowa.

The layoffs will go into effect on January 3, 2024, affecting the following plants:

- John Deere Harvester Works in East Moline, Illinois: Approximately 200 production employees
- John Deere Davenport Works in Davenport, Iowa: About 80 production employees
- John Deere Seeding and Cylinder Operations in Moline, Illinois: Seven production employees

Deere says it is grappling with a weakening farm economy, resulting in a downturn in its sales. In a statement released through local Iowa news station KWQC-TV's website, the company forecasts that row-crop cash receipts will decrease by 18 percent this year, following a 5 percent decline last year. Deere also noted that the average price of corn being harvested has dropped by 37 percent from 2022, with soybean prices plummeting 24 percent and wheat prices falling 35 percent.

Deere is, therefore, once again placing the burden of declining sales on workers. Since March, Deere has laid off nearly 2,600 workers across plants in Ankeny, Dubuque, Ottumwa, Waterloo, and the Quad Cities' Davenport and East Moline, as well as office workers at its Urbandale research center, in Moline, and at other offices in Johnston and Dubuque.

This job bloodletting is being met with resounding silence by the United Auto Workers (UAW), the union covering

most Deere workers in the US. A Deere worker based in Waterloo, Iowa, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "The UAW is doing nothing. We didn't have any layoffs in Waterloo this time, but I don't think they're done. They have a couple of busy months ahead, and then I expect them to lay off again." When asked if the UAW had called any demonstrations to protest the layoffs, the worker said, "No, at least not that I know of. The union is up the company's ass. To be honest, the only reason I still pay my dues is that I have a chance to vote them all out."

As the WSWS has repeatedly stressed, the job cuts can only be successfully opposed by workers taking control of the situation through the formation of rank-and-file committees.

In the same statement, Deere told its readers that the jobs weren't being sent overseas or to Mexico, they were just being eliminated. Deere said, "It is important to note these layoffs are due to reduced demand for the products produced at these facilities. They are not related to production moves. As we have repeatedly stated, layoffs this fiscal year are due to the weakening farm economy and a reduction in customer orders for our equipment.

The decision by Deere to include this expresses the nationalist fervor being peddled by both capitalist parties. In addition to Trump's fascist rantings about imposing heavy-handed tariffs on foreign goods—reminiscent of the 1930s, before World War II, to somehow promote jobs in America—the Democratic Party, along with the trade union bureaucracy, has for years pushed similar nationalist poison.

On the heels of the layoff of more than 300 John Deere

workers in Waterloo in late September, following layoff announcements in the summer, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders visited Dubuque, Iowa, on Friday, October 11 to promote the Harris presidential campaign. He used the occasion to denounce Deere's decision to move more than 2,000 jobs to Mexico, announced earlier this year.

In his speech, Sanders said, "The American people are getting sick and tired of corporate greed. What we're seeing here with John Deere is over a period of years, some 2,000 hardworking people are going to be losing their jobs and see their jobs go to Mexico, where people are making a fraction of the wages that American workers make. That's got to change."

Sanders continued, "My message to John Deere is pretty simple. Stop these layoffs. Put your employees in Iowa and Illinois back to work. Stop outsourcing jobs to Mexico, end your greed and treat the workers in your company with the respect they deserve."

He continued, "I don't want corporations in this country running to China and leaving American workers out on the street. All of you know, we have lost thousands and thousands of factories in this country. Communities have been destroyed because of these disastrous trade agreements."

Sanders' comments mirror the nationalist agitation of the trade union bureaucracy, which for decades has attempted to stoke hostility to foreign workers by claiming they were "stealing American jobs" due to unfair trade policies. The promotion of anti-Chinese sentiments takes place amidst the mounting US war drive against China.

Furthermore, Sanders' appeal for Deere to "end your greed" is empty demagogy. The problem is not the greed of this or that capitalist owner but the entire social system based on private profit extracted from the labor of workers, who in fact are the true wealth creators.

Ultimately, Sanders' nationalist appeals—wholly supported by the UAW—is an attempt to scapegoat foreign workers for the massive inequality brought on by capitalism. These policies aim to undermine the unity of the working class by fostering racism, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant chauvinism, in order to pit worker against worker.

As Sanders admitted, "People are seeing many of these corporations making huge profits, giving their CEOs compensation packages that are three, 400 times more than the workers make. And people are saying, 'That's wrong.'"

He went on, "You've got about 25 percent of seniors in this country living on \$15,000 a year. If you lift the cap and go after the wealthiest people, you can expand Social Security benefits and increase its solvency by decades."

These conditions are the direct result of bipartisan policies enacted by both Republican and Democratic Parties, who serve corporations like John Deere.

For its part, the UAW has repeatedly signed off on and promoted nationalistic attacks on foreign workers, with tragic consequences.

In 1982, Vincent Chin was brutally beaten to death in Detroit by Chrysler plant superintendent Ronald Ebens and his unemployed stepson, Michael Nitz. This murder occurred during a period of intense anti-Japanese sentiment fueled by the United Auto Workers and Democratic Party politicians. Following an altercation at a bar, the two men attacked Chin with a baseball bat, shouting, "It's because of you little (expletives) that we're out of work!" It should be noted, Ebens and Nitz never served a single day in jail.

Deere workers must begin building a network of rank-and-file committees uniting Deere workers at every factory and workplace, expanding outwards to all UAW workplaces to defend against job cuts. Workers must fight against all forms of bigotry and nationalist chauvinism, and unite with their brothers and sisters across the world. Workers should aim their anger at the corporations and the politicians that do their bidding, not at brother workers in other countries who are trying to survive and provide for their families.



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