UAW tells John Deere workers nothing in run-up to vote on Sunday

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On Sunday, the United Auto Workers and John Deere will force 11,200 farm machinery workers to vote on a contract without telling them what is in it. Workers at 12 factories in Iowa, Illinois and Kansas will be given self-serving "highlights" of the agreement the very day that they have to vote on an agreement that was announced Thursday morning.

The only thing workers now know about the new deal is that it will dictate the terms of their labor for six years. The message being sent by the UAW and John Deere is: "trust us."

But John Deere workers have watched in recent days as the UAW has conspired with Fiat Chrysler (FCA) to attack the wages and living standards of autoworkers. They are entirely justified in their suspicions of the UAW-John Deere alliance.

The head of the UAW for John Deere is Vice President Norwood Jewell, who has also been the point man in efforts to push through a deal at FCA in the face of the overwhelming opposition expressed in the two-to-one "no" vote that concluded this past week. Now he is attempting a similar maneuver at John Deere.

The last contract, signed in 2009, preserved the two-tier wage system at John Deere that has become a focal point of opposition among autoworkers. It also significantly increased healthcare costs and also increased the probation period for new hires from three to seven months.

There can be no doubt that the new contract contains even further concessions. Why else would the UAW fail to give workers advance notice about what they are voting on?

Also contained in the last contract was language that ties the hands and feet of workers, prohibiting any strikes. "The Union, and the employees it represents," it states, "agrees that it will condemn and will not authorize, encourage, or promote any curtailment or restriction of production, sit down, slowdown, or other form of strike or work stoppage on the part of any employee…"

The language goes on to declare that any action to defend the interests of workers "shall be grounds for immediate disciplinary action." No organization that has agreed to such terms can be trusted to advance the interests of the working class.

There is widespread anger among workers over the shotgun vote organized by the UAW. In the words of one John Deere worker who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site:* "It's BS. They should email the contract in full to the locals for review immediately. The locals should have a couple days to talk about it."

Another worker from Iowa said: "I believe people should ask lots of questions and read the highlights… If most people knew their current contract better they could ask better questions and they have had six years to go over it. The leadership should be willing to answer all questions no matter how long it takes. What would be nice is an opportunity to discuss in general small groups like an intermission then come back for a final Q&A before voting."

The UAW will provide no such time for discussion. As evidenced by the UAW's attempt to ram through a contract on 40,000 FCA autoworkers, the union cannot be trusted to provide any time for discussion or deliberation.

In the words of another Deere worker, "The corrupt UAW management are using the same dirty tactics against the Deere rank-and-file as they are against Chrysler's. Tell them to stuff it."

The WSWS urges John Deere workers to reject the deal presented to them Sunday with the contempt it deserves. The UAW is clearly seeking to use John

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Deere workers in an effort to derail the eruption of working class opposition that was expressed in the “no” vote at FCA. The union hopes that if it can ram through a contract at Deere, it will be in a better position to push through a rotten agreement at FCA, Ford and GM.

Moreover, the actions of the UAW in relation to both the autoworkers and the John Deere workers makes clear that the agreement that it has reached can be nothing other than a rotten sellout.

The task before autoworkers, John Deere workers and the rest of the working class is to unite and broaden the struggle for social equality. This cannot take place through the UAW. It requires the formation of independent rank-and-file factory committees composed of the workers themselves, to open lines of communications between John Deere workers, their brothers and sisters at the Big Three auto companies and the rest of the international working class.

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