John Deere workers denounce vote and demand recount

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7 October 2015

John Deere workers have denounced Sunday's contract ratification as suspicious and fraudulent, and many are demanding a recount. Workers were forced to vote on a six-year contract between the United Auto Workers and John Deere, maker of farm and construction equipment, only hours after the UAW presented its bogus "highlights" of the deal.

The suspicious character of the outcome can be traced all the way back to the announcement of the opening negotiations between the UAW and Deere. Throughout the entire process, which lasted over a month, workers were told nothing. About an hour after the previous contract expired, without a word from the UAW, the union suddenly announced that it had reached a tentative agreement. Before the announcement, workers were told that the UAW would hold a "big meeting" to vote on a deal. Leading up to the vote on Sunday, October 5, workers were still kept in the dark.

On the day of the vote, workers were given a "highlights" brochure, denying them the right and the time to study the full contract. Furthermore, to make sure that there was a quick and hasty review process, UAW officials "guided" workers through the highlights.

After the stunning blow delivered by Fiat Chrysler workers in rejecting a deal backed by the UAW, the overriding concern of the union was to prevent any linking up of struggles by autoworkers and Deere workers.

In the end, workers were forced to decide on the next six years of their lives in the span of a few hours, in an immensely tense and pressure-filled atmosphere. This has long been the *modus operandi* of the UAW and other unions.

In contract law, however, any contract forced through under duress is legally invalid. Workers therefore have every right to question the validity of this contract, to study the details of the full agreement very closely, and to demand a recount under the close watch of the most trusted and militant rank-and-file workers.

While the UAW and Deere have not publicly released the official results from Sunday's vote, the *World Socialist Web Site* received the following document from a Deere worker detailing Sunday's vote. Although the official results are still in question, the extremely close margin of 51 percent "yes" to 49 percent "no" confirms the immense opposition among workers and their growing hostility against the UAW. As with the autoworkers, the powerful opposition of Deere workers is an expression of the growing combativeness of the working class and the reemergence of the class struggle.

The following are comments written by workers to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* on the UAW-Deere conspiracy:

A Deere worker from Moline, Illinois wrote, "Here's my thing, you hold a vote on a Sunday morning/afternoon at an off site place. Any other union elections are done on site with no problem. Why not have ballots and ballot boxes readily available throughout a certain day at the plants so that all membership has the equal opportunity to cast their vote, or some type of absentee ballot for those who know they will not be able to attend? If there were ballots thrown out because of whatever reason, there should be some type of appeal process. The vote should be retaken."

An assembly worker from Dubuque, Iowa stated, "The vote was close, just a couple of points. That's close enough to have a recount." He added, "We should know exactly what was said during the negotiations. We should know exactly what was taking

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place. When I told my chairperson this, he said ‘you don’t want to know what said.’ What he meant was, ‘we screwed you over.’”

Writing on Facebook, a worker from Waterloo, Iowa said, “How many ballots were handed out? How many members checked in? Why were retirees handed ballots? Why was a spouse handed a ballot? Why were people going up and saying I didn’t get a ballot and then handed one? Why did they quit checking people in? Why were people who went out and smoked or whatever get handed a ballot when they reentered? Why were people given a ballot with no ID in the lost card line? Why did they hand people a ballot when they would go up to the line and say I didn’t get a ballot? How many of our Janitors voted? Their cards look like ours. One retiree returned his ballot to the hall. When I went through the line nobody was checking identification nothing, I could have been a terminated employee. How many other locals other than 838 had such a incorrect, lazy process as we witnessed here?”

Another worker from Ottumwa, Iowa revealed the depth of opposition among workers to the contract. “A worker spoke at the ratification vote after the chairman and the president of the local read through the highlight pamphlet. This worker called the proposed contract ‘nothing’ and ‘a slap in the face.’ He went on to describe what it offered us for the next six years. He urged his fellow brothers and sisters to vote ‘no’ and to make a stand. The auditorium erupted in cheers and applause. Some other members also followed up with their disappointment with the contract. No one spoke up in favor of it. I’m proud to say it was voted down by 66 percent of the membership in Ottumwa.

“Presently, my friends and I think the best course of action is to challenge the election results and demand some transparency. Out of some 10,000 members it was approved by 180-vote difference. We are all skeptical about the validity of the results. Why were the results posted on our local’s web site and then quickly taken down? Who ordered that? Why can’t we see the results from each local? Also, it has been made known that if anything else was written on the ballot, that ballot might not have been counted. Even though we weren’t told this before hand.

“A lot of members didn’t think they were going to get a fair shake, that the UAW International would represent us fairly. Really they offered us nothing and did nothing to close the gap (in wages between senior workers and lower-paid second tier workers). They only created a further gap. There’s a shadiness to the whole election. The election committee chairman said it was up to their discretion on how to count ballots that had anything written on them.

“The other thing that bothered me about this was this ratification bonus. This was just a way of manipulating us, to get this contract pushed through. As I have heard, (UAW Vice President) Norwood Jewell, in the last hours of the contract negotiations, asked Deere about putting the $3,500 bonus back on the table. I’m totally against such a ratification bonus even though I could use it. It’s a way to manipulate and bribe us into accepting a terrible contract.

“We’ve said that highlights pamphlet is wrong. We need to see the details. We are calling for a recount. There is a big distrust of the International leadership. They are appointed and not elected. It’s become a fat, corrupt organization. It’s become an elitist organization.

“Workers are getting smarter about the way things are today. Where did the strike fund go for the UAW? I don’t want to go on a strike, but I think we have to.

“Our whole political process is controlled by the corporations like Deere. The entire process is controlled by the billionaires. Obama extended the Bush-era tax cuts. I consider myself a socialist. We need a real alternative for workers today. I’m very interested in forming a rank-and-file committee, and I agree we need to unite all workers against the corporations.”

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