

Growing demands from John Deere workers for recount on sell-out contract

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One week has passed since the United Autoworkers (UAW) and farm and construction manufacturer John Deere announced the ratification of a new six-year labor agreement. Workers have denounced the vote as a fraud after being forced to decide on the contract only hours after reviewing its “highlights,” and only days after the announcement of an agreement between Deere and the UAW.

The demand by workers for a recount has been met with silence from the UAW.

With only a few hours to make a decision, workers were told to accept a sellout contract that preserved the two-tier system, increased out-of-pocket health care costs and did nothing to address the continued layoffs facing workers. The vote was rammed through by the UAW without giving workers time to consider the issues at stake that affect their lives for the next six years.

Such methods are thoroughly anti-democratic and violate the most elementary rights of workers to study a labor contract closely with a reasonable amount of time, and to have the right to campaign against it. Moreover, the most basic precepts of contract law make clear that a contract is invalid if signed under duress. In this case, the UAW, in collusion with Deere, placed enormous pressure and the threat of economic hardship upon workers to get the contract passed as rapidly as possible.

According to a document received by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the new six year contract was approved by a thin margin of 51.2 percent (3,848) voting “yes” to 48.8 percent (3,668) voting “no”: a difference of only 180 votes. The methods surrounding the vote and its results have been called into question by many workers. Even if one takes as good coin the official vote tallies, one cannot ignore the sharp

difference between the recently announced results and those from the previous 2009 vote, where 83 percent of workers voted “yes.”

Such a stark difference is an expression of the growing hostility of workers to both the company and the UAW. Since 2009, John Deere has made record profits and millions have been handed to the CEO of the company and its shareholders.

Following the Deere vote, the UAW is working to push through a sellout agreement to Fiat-Chrysler workers that largely preserves everything autoworkers rejected in the previous proposal. The chief role of the UAW has been to try to divide Deere workers from autoworkers and to prevent a joint struggle of the working class against the auto and farm-equipment companies.

A worker from Davenport, Iowa told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “I think the entire process was flawed, and the vote was rushed big time. I think they should have given us more time to analyze the contract closely. Pretty much everybody I talked to felt the same way. The margin of error was about 180 votes, and it was way too close for comfort... I voted ‘no’ on this contract. As soon as I looked at the contract highlighter, I knew the contract wasn’t any good.

“They used the sign-up bonus of \$1,000 as a bribe, and right away I knew something was wrong. Even the entire wording of the highlights was terrible. We really didn’t gain anything in the contract, and they took more from us than we gained. The two-tier system remaining was the biggest negative of this contract. With regards to health care, having a family and the deductible going up is going to make it very hard for me.

“Most of the workers I talked to were opposed to this. I thought the leaflets you handed out were very

informative. Other workers I talked to thought your coverage was spot on too.

“We should have a recount. We should be given at least a week before a vote, and we shouldn’t be kept in the dark.”

A worker from Ottumwa, Iowa also demanded a recount and denounced the vote.

“We should have the right to be able to review the contract in detail and have a reasonable amount of time to consider with our fellow rank-and-file members. The vote was rushed through and members were kept in the dark.

“The way the vote was conducted was a violation of the democratic process. I also think the negotiations should have minutes available. What the negotiators do should be available to the workers, and the whole process should be transparent.

“We also demand to close the gap in the two-tier wage system, and anything less is unacceptable. We as workers have the right to be treated fairly. Deere has made record profits year after year, and we are told we have to keep losing and losing our benefits. Workers have a right to demand more.

“The corporations are also slowly putting the costs of health care back on the workers. I think it’s unreasonable. In light of the profits they’ve made, the companies should pay for good, affordable health care.”

“We have a lot of laid off workers that have families to feed that need their jobs back, and Deere should be responsible to those employees and do what’s right.”

A worker from Moline, Illinois said, “As an unemployed worker, I’m in limbo and the contract’s effects haven’t fully kicked in. But my thoughts on it are... basically we made concessions once again. At the same time, since the last contract we have hit record profits for 5.5 years. There’s plenty of money.”

“The two-tier system should be ended. We also have two different pension and health care systems now. The second-tier only gets a third of the benefits of the retirees. Our health care is diminished and ends the day we retire. If I retire today, my wife and kids are covered for thirty days and that’s it.

“It doesn’t take much of a brain to realize that compared to thirty years ago, John Deere could afford to give workers more benefits, and today they say they can’t afford it.

“I think two to three hours—whatever it ended up being per local—was not enough time to actually review the contract and to get the facts on everything. I would demand a recount without a doubt! The vote should have been looked over outside of the negotiations committee by workers. It should be an open and transparent process. And anyone that wants to sit and review it should be able to do so. It’s 2015 and soon to be 2016. We are in the age of technology and we are still writing on paper ballots!”

“Where the ‘yes’ vote came from is very questionable to me. The ‘Post-97’ Facebook group [A John Deere workers’ Facebook group with more than 3000 members] presented a unanimous ‘no.’ Everyone on that group said they were going to vote ‘no.’ Like anything else, I know people who voted ‘yes’. But from most locals, it seemed like it was going to be a ‘no’ vote—overwhelmingly. Even 51 percent to 49 percent in my eyes is too close. There was enormous opposition. Two of the biggest facilities voted it down. Waterloo was one of the biggest or right up there, 66 percent against to 34 percent for it. If anything, I feel terrible for the Waterloo employees that actually voted it down and have to live with it now.

“For the locals that did pass by close margins... a lot of it came down to what you were told in a very short period of time and how you were told. If you were told this was the best you can get, then some people may have been pressured to vote for it. They were forced into voting for this contract. They have to live with this sellout contract for six years. I absolutely think we need to have a revote controlled and monitored by rank-and-file workers.”



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