

UAW keeps workers in the dark as contract negotiations with Deere enter second week

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To get in touch with the World Socialist Web Site to discuss forming a rank-and-file committee, John Deere workers can email deerewrfc@gmail.com or text ? (484) 514-9797?. ??

As contract talks between the United Auto Workers (UAW) and farm and construction equipment giant Deere & Co. entered their second week, workers are expressing anger over being kept in the dark on the status of negotiations by the UAW.

Talks between Deere and the UAW began last Tuesday with the current six-year contract expiring on October 1. Some 10,100 workers from plants in Iowa and Illinois, and a Kansas facility, will be covered under the new contract.

The UAW has told workers nothing. “Not a thing has come out,” one worker told the WSWS, “it’s all silent.” Another worker added, “I haven’t heard anything either.”

The UAW has remained publicly silent on negotiations, not publishing anything on contract talks with Deere on its website or Facebook page. It is imposing a blackout on negotiations, with the aim of keeping Deere workers off-guard and preventing them from mobilizing opposition to another sellout contract.

The UAW told workers it will hold a strike authorization vote on September 12 and reveal the company’s initial offer for feedback from workers. A contract ratification vote will then be held at the end of September, or early October, the workers were told. “This is the first time in my 14 years we will have the company’s first offer to look at before we vote,” a Deere worker told the WSWS.

If the UAW is pretending to be “democratic” it is only because the Solidarity House executives and their regional and local flunkies are keenly aware that Deere workers are determined not to have another sellout

agreement rammed down their throats. In 2015, the UAW rammed through the last deal without giving workers a chance to read a single word of it. Instead, the UAW distributed a 17-page “highlights” document to workers two hours before they voted. The UAW claimed the deal passed by the razor thin margin of 180 votes, amid accusations of vote fraud and workers’ demands for a recount.

Even if the UAW unveils the company’s initial offer, this will only be combined with a campaign of lies and intimidation aimed at forcing workers to accept it.

Last week, the WSWS published the statement “UAW and John Deere meet to negotiate on how to ram through a sellout contract.” Thousands of workers have read the statement and many have expressed to the WSWS their determination and readiness to wage a fight to win back concessions handed out by the UAW in previous contracts.

The statement made clear that the so-called “negotiations” between the UAW and Deere are not negotiations between two rival parties, but rather planning meetings between two collaborating interests over how to strangle opposition among workers to impose yet another pro-corporate agreement.

The UAW-Deere talks are being led by UAW Vice President Terry Dittes who oversaw the betrayal of a 40-day strike by 46,000 General Motors workers in 2019. The deal signed by Dittes allowed the Detroit automaker to massively expand its low-paid temporary workforce and proceed with the shutdown of three factories, including the Lordstown, Ohio assembly plant.

If Deere workers are to prevent another sellout and prepare a real fight to win substantial improvements in pay, benefits and working conditions, they will have to take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands.

This means following the example of the Volvo Trucks workers in Virginia and Pennsylvania, and most recently Dana workers by establishing rank-and-file committees, which are controlled democratically by workers themselves and committed to fight for what workers need, not what the company and the UAW says is affordable. The formation of a Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee will set the stage for a genuine fight back against the company and the union.

Conditions have sharply deteriorated after decades of UAW-backed concessions. “This is not a good company to work for anymore,” a veteran worker at Deere’s Harvester Works in western Illinois said. “If I hadn’t been here as long, I would have left. A lot of new hires are walking out the door. They have sliced the standards for our work, so we work harder for less money.”

Like several other workers who reached out to the WSWs, the worker said that Deere’s CIPP productivity improvement scheme—the Continuous Improvement Pay Plan—was a major source of dissatisfaction among workers: “The company brags about CIPP payouts. The departments with this force you to put your body thru hell. Then the company says, ‘It didn’t happen here.’ They just want machines out the door.

“Several workers have gotten hurt and have lawsuits,” the worker continued. “Rumor has it you have to go to Chicago to get a good lawyer that’s not in bed with Deere. The union is not strong enough. I don’t know, maybe they’re in Deere’s pocket too. The company does what they want.”

Another Deere worker told the WSWs, “The last contract was my first experience. I loathe to admit voting ‘yes,’ but I did, despite my hesitancy. Our local reps had assured me it was a good deal and I foolishly trusted them.

“There’s lots of issues at my facility, I don’t even know if I could list them all,” he continued. “Safety is something that concerns me personally which gets deflected by both the company and the union safety rep. Too many people and parts crammed into too small of a building, tons of forced overtime, mismanagement issues, and so on.”

He said the CIPP program pitted workers against each other. “The CIPP program steals our hard work and gets teams fighting with each other,” he explained. “I’ve been told the union doesn’t want to fight the

program.”

Indeed, CIPP is only one of the myriad of “joint labor-management” schemes cooked up by the UAW and the corporations over the last 40 years, as the UAW abandoned any resistance to the attacks on workers and was integrated into the structure of corporate management.

The formation of a rank-and-file committee is necessary to establish lines of communication and coordinated action with workers at Volvo, Dana, the Big Three automakers and Deere, Caterpillar, Case IH workers throughout the US and internationally. Only in this way can workers prepare an industrial counter-offensive to overturn decades of eroding living standards and working conditions.



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