

John Deere workers ready for contract fight with near-unanimous strike authorization vote

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John Deere workers: take the initiative out of the hands of the UAW bureaucracy! Join the fight to build the John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee by emailing deerewrfc@gmail.com or texting (484) 514-9797?.

On Sunday, John Deere workers showed their resolve to fight for substantial improvements in wages and conditions with a nearly unanimous strike authorization vote.

Talks between the UAW and farm and construction equipment giant Deere & Company began on August 20. The current six-year contract expires on October 1, with 10,100 workers from Iowa, Illinois and Kansas covered under the new contract.

United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 94 Dubuque, Iowa, registered 844 “Yes” votes to 7 “No” votes. UAW Local 281 in Davenport, Iowa, recorded 666 “Yes” votes and 4 “No” votes. The largest local, UAW Local 838 in Waterloo, Iowa, voted to strike by a margin of 99.37 percent, according to the union’s Facebook page. The rest of the locals voted by similar margins.

The determination of Deere workers to fight is being met with the determination of the UAW and Deere to strangle it. On the same day of the strike authorization, the UAW revealed details of the company’s initial “offer,” containing provocative concessions including the ending of a plant closure moratorium, an increase in workers’ share of health care premiums from zero to 20 percent, and ending overtime pay for working over 8 hours.

The latest financial results from the company blow to smithereens any arguments by the company or union that there is not enough money to meet the demands of workers. Last month, Deere announced profits of over \$1.6 billion for the third quarter of the year, or \$160,000 for every one of the 10,100 workers under the contract.

However, the offer confirms what the WSWs has been warning since the beginning: the UAW is preparing to sell out Deere workers. The union is no doubt trying to soften

the blow by putting out the worst possible contract first and working their way backwards. Whatever concessions their counteroffer includes, they will refer to this contract to argue they have made gains, for example, by perhaps proclaiming that they have reduced the increase in health insurance premiums by some small amount.

The UAW is ruthlessly pursuing a strategy of defeat, and it has the right man to get the job done. The Deere talks are being led by UAW Vice President Terry Dittes, the architect of the betrayal of the 40-day General Motors strike in 2019. That deal, stamped with his approval, allowed GM to increase its low-paid temporary workforce and close three factories, including the historic Lordstown, Ohio, assembly plant.

The UAW has maintained a near blackout about the Deere negotiations. Until last Sunday, the UAW shared nothing to members about contract talks, let alone even acknowledged that they are ongoing. In fact, some workers told the WSWs they were not even aware the UAW had shared information on the current tentative agreement on Sunday.

A Deere worker told the WSWs, “They didn’t give it out. They just read it out loud. Zero transparency and zero trust by me. They had a copy posted but wouldn’t let anyone take pictures.” The union wants workers to have as little information as possible and suppress any attempt to fight against another sellout contract.

Workers have also expressed bewilderment that the union scheduled a contract vote on October 10 before they have even reached a tentative agreement. This is a clear indication that the “negotiation” process is a sham and that it is seeking to force through whatever it and Deere management worked out well in advance. Moreover, the October 10 deadline will keep workers on the job ten days after the previous contract expires, forcing workers to stockpile products and undermine any potential strike.

The UAW is keenly aware of the anger among Deere workers and is preparing for possible strike action. A Deere

worker told the WSWS, “A UAW trustee told us this morning he is sure we’ll strike.” A worker at the Faurecia exhaust systems plant in Columbus, Indiana, told the WSWS the company is pushing John Deere parts and stockpiling the overproduction. “It is like they expect a strike and are pushing to help Deere get ready.”

As it has across the auto industry and beyond, the UAW has suppressed opposition at Deere on behalf of the company for many decades. The last walkout called by the UAW at Deere was decades ago in 1986, a “selective” strike which it initially called at only three of 14 UAW plants. The company, knowing the UAW would not conduct a serious struggle, responded with a national 163 day lockout. Despite the determination of workers, the fight ended in a UAW-orchestrated defeat and substantial concessions.

The union rammed through the last agreement in 2015 without workers ever reading the actual contract. It released a 17-page “highlights” document shared the day workers were to vote, giving them only two hours to read it. While the UAW claimed the agreement passed by a margin of only 180 votes, workers widely suspected fraud and demanded a recount.

The ideological basis of the converting of the UAW into an arm of management is the doctrine of corporatism, or the supposed identity of the interests of workers with management. As James Hecker, a lead UAW negotiator during the 1986 strike, later claimed in comments to the *Moline Dispatch*, “We both (the UAW and Deere) really decided we needed to have a more collaborative than adversarial relationship—that sort of mindset. Over time, it became more collaborative.”

On this basis, the UAW has overseen, over the past four decades, the rollback of wages and working conditions to levels not seen since long before the creation of the industrial unions nearly a century ago. At auto parts maker Dana, the UAW and the United Steelworkers jointly oversee sweatshop conditions, where workers go for weeks without getting a single day off.

Workers, however, are beginning to fight back. This was demonstrated earlier this year in the rebellion by workers at Volvo Trucks in Virginia, who organized themselves independently through the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which enabled workers to reject three consecutive sellout deals and force a five-week strike.

Parts workers at Dana have formed their own rank-and-file committee to demand an end to the unions’ day-to-day contract extensions in the aftermath of a massive rejection of their tentative agreement, and the immediate setting of a strike date. By forming such a committee to unite their coworkers against the union’s attempts to isolate and demoralize them, and to appeal to their brothers and sisters

in the motor vehicle industry across the world for support, Deere workers can fight back against the two-pronged assault from the company and the UAW.

The Faurecia worker told the WSWS, “There are too many similarities in the conditions we face: low pay, forced overtime, no safety and new hires making even less money. All the major corporations and all the unions worldwide got together and they are doing this to their employees—Volvo, Nabisco, the train drivers in Germany and the miners in Chile. We need to build the rank-and-file movement to put our foot down.”

This struggle can and must be won, but it requires that Deere workers begin taking the initiative now. This means following the example of Volvo Trucks workers and Dana workers by establishing their own rank-and-file committee. Such a committee will be controlled and led democratically by workers themselves, not by well-paid union bureaucrats, and fight for what workers need, not what the company is willing to accept. The committee must draw up workers’ own demands, which should include:

- An end to the two-tier system, with all workers brought up to top pay and benefits
- A 30 percent across-the-board pay increase to make up for the years of wage freezes and stagnation
- An annual cost-of-living escalator clause to keep up with spiking inflation
- Fully paid health care benefits for current workers and retirees, with no co-pays or premiums

A Deere committee will lay the groundwork with the committees across other Deere plants and link up with workers at Volvo, Dana, the Big Three automakers, Caterpillar, Case IH and others throughout the US and internationally to prepare a fightback against years of joint company-union attacks on the working class.



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