

Workers have a right to know what's in the agreement!

UAW announces tentative agreement with Deere, setting stage for contract showdown

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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?.

The United Auto Workers announced early on Friday afternoon that it had reached a tentative agreement with agricultural and heavy equipment giant Deere & Company, covering more than 10,000 workers. The deal was announced less than 24 hours after the previous six-year agreement expired at midnight Friday morning, at which point Deere and the UAW had initially stated there would be a two-week extension of the old contract.

Ratification votes at some plants are scheduled for October 10. The UAW has released no details about the contents of its deal with Deere, claiming only in statements to the press that it contains “significant economic gains.”

However, everything about the UAW's conduct in the contract “negotiations” thus far—not to mention its record of agreeing to concessionary contracts over several decades at Deere, Caterpillar, and throughout the auto industry—makes clear that the gains will be all Deere's, not workers'.

In September, the UAW announced that a contract ratification vote was scheduled for October 10, even though no agreement had supposedly been reached yet. The union has kept workers almost entirely in the dark throughout the year, only releasing what it claimed was Deere's initial offer at strike ratification votes last month.

The few details of the proposal revealed by the UAW at the time showed that it amounted to a provocation, with the company demanding an end to a moratorium on plant closures and overtime pay after eight hours, as well as a drastic increase in health care premiums. No doubt it was also aimed at intimidating workers with the worst possible scenario, lowering expectations, and making the ultimate concessionary agreement seem less severe by comparison.

Many workers at Deere have been through this before and know what's coming. In 2015, the UAW announced a

tentative agreement hours after the previous contract expiration. No information about the deal was released until meetings to vote on the agreement, at which only a few pages of selective “highlights” were distributed, giving workers no time to adequately study what they were being asked to vote on. There was nonetheless widespread opposition to the deal. The UAW claimed that it passed by a margin of less than 200 votes, with many workers calling for a recount.

The UAW's veil of silence around its talks and agreement with Deere can only be intended to once again railroad workers and force through six years of even worse attacks on jobs and working conditions.

Workers have a right to know what's really in the contract! While early reports are that the UAW may this time release “highlights” a day or two before the votes, this remains completely unacceptable, preventing workers from making a truly informed decision. Workers should demand the release of the *full* contract, with all letters and memoranda of understanding, and at least a week to study and discuss it. There is no legitimate reason why that cannot be done.

In the current situation, the most dangerous mistake would be for workers to adopt a “wait-and-see” approach to the UAW's deal with Deere. Efforts must be undertaken without delay to organize a resounding “no” vote to any contract which does not include an immediate end to the tier system, substantial wage increases for all workers, the restoration of fully-funded health care and pensions, and annual cost-of-living raises to make up for spiraling inflation.

Rank-and-file committees should be initiated in order to share information across the plants, to develop a strategy to defeat the conspiracy by Deere and the UAW, and link up Deere workers with the 3,500 workers at auto parts maker Dana Corp. who are facing their own struggle against the UAW.

Moreover, given the many suspicions of fraud in the 2015 contract vote and the UAW's refusal to carry out a recount, rank-and-file workers should oversee the vote count to protect the integrity of the vote and prevent any ballot-stuffing by union officials.

Deere has more than enough money to fulfill workers' needs, having made billions over the six years of the last agreement. Deere has already broken its previous annual profit record, reaping \$4.3 billion in net income for the first nine months of the year, blowing past its prior record of \$3.5 billion in 2013.

The abrupt announcement by the UAW of a tentative agreement Friday, only hours after a two-week contract extension was announced, came as a full-scale revolt across Deere's operations threatened to break out. Workers at some plants stopped production at the expiration of the contract at midnight, according to Iowa's *Des Moines Register*, clearly eager for a strike, before the UAW announced minutes later that the contract had been extended and work must continue.

The contract extension itself evoked an outpouring of anger on Facebook. Hundreds of workers commented, the majority in outrage or disgust, on the announcement of the extension posted by UAW Local 838, located at Deere's largest plant in Iowa in Waterloo.

Typical were statements such as: "Pay dues for nothing." "This is only beneficial to Deere, way to back down." "Maybe we should strike against the union." "Wildcat Strike!!!!"

The UAW's contract extension had come in defiance of workers' near-unanimous strike authorization votes last month, with many plants approving strike action by 99 percent.

In an indication of the extreme nervousness in the UAW over their ability to control the situation, as well as their contempt for workers' right to free speech, Local 838 disabled comments on its announcement of the tentative agreement Friday afternoon.

There is simply no reason to believe that Deere's insulting contract offer transformed into "significant economic gains" for workers in the space of a month, without any strike or serious struggle being carried out. In reality, the so-called "negotiations" between Deere and the UAW have not been talks between two adversaries, but rather strategy sessions between Deere and its union "partners" over how to cut labor costs and give the company flexibility to restructure its operations at workers' expense.

A Deere worker at the tractor plant in Waterloo, Iowa, told the *World Socialist Web Site* Friday, "We should be on strike right now. The UAW has been talking about how this is the best position the union has been in in 70 years. So why give in? Commodity prices are high, and we are over 1,000

units behind. John Deere is making record profits."

Workers are in a position of strength, not weakness. A number of reports in the Iowa press in recent months have pointed to Deere's difficulty in hiring and retaining manufacturing workers over the last year.

Auto industry publication *Jalopnik*, writing after the strike authorization vote, stated, "If the strike goes forward, workers would put down tools in the first half of October, and with the harvest season underway, this could spell doom for the company and potentially have larger ripple effects throughout the agriculture industry." The *Wall Street Journal* also reported recently that demand for agricultural equipment is surging on the basis of rising crop prices and farm income.

The struggle at Deere is but one part of a wider movement developing in the working class against low wages, grueling, unsafe working conditions, and obscene levels of social inequality.

Thousands of carpenters in Seattle and coal miners are currently on strike, and strike votes are being taken among tens of thousands of nurses at Kaiser Permanente and film production workers in California. Auto parts workers at Dana—who supply Deere—continue to work under a day-to-day contract extension, after voting by 90 percent to reject an insulting agreement backed by the UAW and the United Steelworkers last month. And on Friday, parents in the United Kingdom and elsewhere engaged in a school strike against the ruling class' homicidal policy of reopening schools while the pandemic continues to be out of control.

If Deere workers are to capitalize on their potential strength and win back what the UAW has bargained away, new organizations and a new strategy must be adopted. In opposition to the UAW's perpetual and dishonest insistence that the company can't afford to meet workers' demands, rank-and-file committees will proceed from what workers actually need, including a good-paying, secure job, a safe and humane workplace, and secure health care and retirement.

We urge all those workers who agree with this perspective and want to organize such a fight to contact the WSWs today.



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