

“The workforce is ready to fight for rights not only for ourselves but for future workers”

John Deere workers speak on battle with management and the UAW

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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? . ?

John Deere workers are livid over the sudden announcement by the United Auto Workers (UAW) last Friday that it had reached an agreement for a new six-year contract with agriculture and heavy equipment manufacturer Deere & Co. The UAW announced the deal, which covers 10,000 workers at plants in Iowa, Illinois and Kansas, less than 24 hours after announcing there would be a two-week extension of the old contract, which expired at midnight on October 1.

Workers have taken to Facebook to denounce the UAW. One comment on the UAW Local 838 Facebook page summed up the attitude of broad sections of workers: “Selling out your union members once again!!”

Another worker commented: “Considering everything the UAW International has done over the past couple years, how many arrests, how much embarrassment and scandals, extra dues paid, for what, NOTHING!!! About as bad if not worse than Corporate America itself. This is the time they SHOULD do everything to PROVE themselves WORTHY again and fight for US!!!”

But the clearing out of union executives—including two International presidents, who were caught taking company bribes and embezzling union funds—has not changed the corporatist character of the UAW. UAW International President Ray Curry said, “our UAW John Deere national bargaining team worked tirelessly.” There is little doubt that the contract was drawn up by Deere’s accountants and lawyers long ago, and the only thing the union bureaucrats have been working tirelessly to do is to push it through without a rank-and-file rebellion.

In July, Curry barely put down a revolt by Volvo Trucks

workers in Virginia who formed a rank-and-file committee and organized to defeat four UAW-backed deals. He forced workers to revote on the defeated deal and then claimed it passed by 17 votes out of the 2,369 ballots counted and shut down their strike. The union is now confronting another upheaval after Dana auto parts workers, who have also set up an independent rank-and-file committee, rejected by a 9-to-1 margin a contract backed by the UAW and the United Steelworkers union.

In comments to the *World Socialist Web Site*, a Dana worker spoke about the common fight Dana and Deere workers face. “I don’t understand why they don’t pay more money and give more incentives to their employees. We are the ones making the money. They wanted to offer us a \$1,000 sign-on bonus. That’s a slap in the face because the salaried people in a couple months are probably going to get way more than that in a bonus. They’re greedy and don’t care. I live on a farm, and I know what those Deere machines cost. I hate the way the UAW and the USW are paying their top people so much money to live high on the hog while we scramble to make a living.”

The union announced that the contract ratification vote, at least for some plants, is scheduled for October 10.

As of this writing, the UAW has not released any details of its deal with Deere. A brief press statement claimed that the deal contains “significant economic gains.” But the UAW said the same thing in 2015, when it rushed through a concessionary contract without giving workers time to study it and then claimed it passed by only 200 votes amid charges of vote fraud. In fact, Deere workers are determined to recoup many decades of UAW-backed concessions, including increased health insurance costs and the two-tier wage system, the latter which was first introduced in 1997.

Workers have told the WSWWS that the UAW is not planning to share the full contract with workers but only

selected “highlights,” as it did during the 2015 contract negotiations. The sugar-coated summary is supposed to be given to workers the Friday and Saturday before the Sunday, October 10 vote.

A Deere worker from Waterloo, Iowa, told the WSWs that workers at his plant had voted by 70 percent to defeat the UAW-backed deal in 2015, “yet the contract passed.” He described the impact of the concessions the UAW granted Deere in the last contract. “We used to pay a \$5 copay for inhalers and other necessities for our health; now an inhaler costs \$30. Copays for visits to the doctor have skyrocketed as well. While I understand that not everyone gets these great benefits, we’re working for a company that is making billions of dollars and forcing people to work mass amounts of overtime.”

Many Deere workers have contacted the WSWs expressing their distrust of the union. They also oppose the UAW’s refusal to do anything to improve working conditions, health and safety, including implementing measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 at their workplaces.

“The facilities in Waterloo have not been updated or renovated for a very long time,” the worker told the WSWs. “The plumbing in the bathrooms is shot, with possibly asbestos falling from the ceilings. Not the best work conditions for people that are forced to spend a lot of time there. I brought up the issue with the company that the restrooms and facilities in general needed attention, but it was to no avail. COVID hit, and these restrooms never got a deep cleaning. Everything Deere claimed to do a COVID protocol, it was all for show. When people started coming up with positive tests, they were out the door, but their areas were never sanitized, and a new body was reluctantly thrown in the next minute.”

He continued, “Fast forward to this new contract, tensions are running extremely high. The union had everyone vote for a right to strike, and everyone signed up for their time slots to picket. When we went into work Thursday night, we expected to walk out and be on strike. At 11:59, we were told to go back to work. Something tells me this was predetermined. You have a workforce full of people who are ready to fight for the rights of not only themselves but the future for workers like them. But, yet again, we are let down by the union that is quickly diminishing. This is the same union that had embezzlement issues and got caught in a lot of situations that proved employees’ union dues were only going to better the lives of those high up in the UAW. I’m not sure how so many people still have hope. I agree with and love optimistic attitudes, but how many times does someone have to fail you before you finally let go? It’s like being in a toxic relationship, where you want to see the good

in someone, but it literally never comes.

“Committeemen, the higher-ups in the union, sit at a comfortable desk with their feet kicked up for 20-30 hours a week while getting an average of everyone’s overtime within the factory. We see them make their rounds to chit-chat, but when it comes to serious situations, they are nowhere to be found. When it comes to asking questions about what is happening with this contract, we hear crickets. The outcome has likely been pre-determined for quite some time. I thought it was now or never time for Deere since they are struggling to find help, but the games still run on. Corporate America, while they are rich, they are also ruining commerce. Prices of everything are on the rise, and for someone to work at such a prestigious place as John Deere and not be able to afford things is mind blowing. We have to budget our income, while the higher-ups are buying private jets and islands. We’re talking multibillions. Is our cut ever going to come?”

The WSWs Autoworker Newsletter published a statement denouncing the UAW’s attempts to hide the full contract. “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.”

The need to build rank-and-file committees is the most urgent task facing Deere workers. Rank-and-file committees should be initiated to take up the fight to defeat the UAW-Deere conspiracy against workers by sharing information across plants, mounting a campaign to defeat the sellout contract, and unite their struggle with the 3,500 workers at auto parts maker Dana Inc., workers at Caterpillar and Case IH and other sections of workers.

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