

“Time to stop these crooked UAW leaders!”

Opposition mounts among Deere workers to UAW information blackout in run-up to Sunday contract vote

Marcus Day
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To learn more about joining the John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email deererwrc@gmail.com or text (484) 514-9797.

Anger is growing among Deere workers over the information blackout being carried out by the United Auto Workers union in the lead-up to Sunday’s vote on a new six-year tentative agreement with the agricultural and heavy equipment giant. The UAW announced a deal last Friday which would cover approximately 10,100 Deere workers in Iowa, Illinois and Kansas only hours after the expiration of the previous contract.

The union has stated that it will only release “highlights” of the contract this Friday and Saturday, a day or two before Sunday’s vote, clearly to stampede workers into accepting the agreement. However, there is already significant opposition to the deal, with workers taking to Facebook to call for a “no” vote based on their experience of the UAW’s 2015 sellout and their determination to reverse earlier concessions.

To fight back against the ongoing conspiracy between the UAW and the company, workers this week formed the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee. On Tuesday, the committee issued a statement demanding the release of the full contract and all side letters and memoranda, a full week to study it, and workers’ oversight of the vote and ballot count, in order to prevent any possibility of fraud. The statement also outlined what workers required of any contract for it to be acceptable, including the immediate end of the two-tier wage and benefit system, a 30 percent general wage increase and annual cost-of-living raises, fully paid health care for active and retired workers, and an

end to the CIPP productivity incentive scheme with no loss of pay.

“I am an Ottumwa production worker, and have previously worked at other Deere plants,” a worker in Iowa told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. “This is my third contract, and I am utterly disgusted with how International continues for self-serving reasons to sell out our contract, time after time!”

Another worker from Deere’s Waterloo plant, its largest factory in Iowa, wrote to the WSWS and said, “I do not trust our union to have our best interests at heart. They have been in bed with corporate Deere for so long that a lot of us feel we are picking the lesser of the two evils by staying in the union Local 838.”

UAW Local 838 in Waterloo, Iowa, was flooded with several hundred outraged comments and calls for strike action on its Facebook page last Friday after announcing an extension of the previous contract a minute after its midnight expiration. Local 838 officials have since sought to simply muzzle criticisms and shield themselves from the ire of the rank and file, disabling comments on most of their posts.

In a subsequent expression of UAW officials’ extreme nervousness and their contempt for the workers they claim to represent, the page posted on Tuesday, “Local 838 Members the goal of this page is to educate and inform. Negativity is not welcome. Thank you.”

This latest post has only fueled workers’ anger and suspicions further. “So, all our dues limit us to happy warm thoughts and not how we really feel, I must have

missed that part in the bylaws,” one wrote sarcastically. “If you’re here to ‘Inform’ than why are you not showing the workers the TA?” another popular comment read. “If there would be 100% transparency then all would be fine, but the rank and file feel like something is being hidden from them,” a third wrote.

Workers distrust of the UAW has been increased significantly in recent years in the course of a sprawling corruption scandal, which revealed that much of the union’s top leadership was either taking bribes from company management or embezzling workers’ dues. In 2019, former UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell, who led the 2015 UAW-Deere contract negotiations, pleaded guilty to charges related to his acceptance of payoffs from Fiat Chrysler (now Stellantis).

New information continues to emerge regarding the illicit activities of UAW officials. An autoworker in Michigan wrote to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* in reply to the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee statement and said, “Treasurer Tim Edmunds for UAW Local 412 Unit 10 (Stellantis) was just caught stealing \$2 million of our local dues money.” As the WSWS recently reported on this latest revelation of embezzlement, “The size of the theft is all the more remarkable given the relatively small size of the local, which had only \$3.26 million in assets in 2020 and expenditures of \$2.9 million according to US Labor Department filings. How funds nearly equivalent to the local’s entire annual budget could go missing without being noticed defies any easy explanation.”

The worker continued, “They sold us out to the company since 2008. We had no raises and benefits cut for over 10 years. We heard the same bull***t from our so-called leaders just like what is happening to UAW Deere employees.”

Addressing himself to Deere workers, he concluded, “Time to stop these crooked UAW leaders!!! DON’T BACK DOWN!!!!”

There is a growing mood of determination and desire among Deere workers, autoworkers, and broad sections of the working class to win substantial wage increases and improvements in working conditions, particularly as the major corporations are making record profits while forcing their employees to expose themselves to the coronavirus pandemic. In addition, workers are feeling increasingly self-confident and combative, feeling strengthened by labor shortages and the

companies’ difficulty in fulfilling orders.

While workers are seeking to fight, the UAW and other unions are continuing to work with their corporate “partners” to try to force through concessions, cut labor costs, and offload the burden of supply chain shortages onto workers. In response, growing numbers of workers have organized rank-and-file committees independent of the unions this year, including at Volvo Trucks, Mack Trucks (also owned by Volvo), and Dana Incorporated, an auto parts maker which supplies Deere and much of the auto industry.

“I’m in the Mack Trucks Rank-and-File Committee and I strongly encourage all of you working at John Deere to get together with each other and form a rank-and-file committee of your own as soon as possible,” a Mack Trucks worker told the WSWS. “The UAW is good for nothing but concessions to the company. I don’t know what phrasing they use with you all, but they always tell us at contract time that ‘We have to be fair.’ They mean fair to the company when they say that. We are not the ones that have to be fair. It’s our work they make all that money off.

“The company will not give the money they made off your back to you easily. You have to fight for it. The UAW is never going to lead a winning fight for you. Every now and then you might get thrown a bone in one area but it’s always at the cost of something much more and slowly everything good gets edged out of that contract book.

“You need to lead the fight yourselves and get what’s yours, independently from the UAW as the workers in the plants. Form a rank-and-file committee and talk to us at Mack. We’ll tell you what we have seen, and you tell us what you have seen.”



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