

Leaked details of UAW-Deere contract reveal attacks on pay, benefits

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

On Thursday evening, details of the tentative agreement between the United Auto Workers union and agricultural equipment giant Deere and Company for a new six-year contract began to leak out. The UAW's contract summary and related documents are scheduled to be distributed beginning at 5 a.m. Friday morning, just two days before Sunday's contract vote.

An initial review of the changes already confirms what the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* has warned: The UAW is seeking to ram through another sellout agreement containing major attacks on workers' wages and benefits.

Chief among the concessions are paltry wage increases that would fall far below the current rate of inflation of 5 percent. General wage increases are included in only three of the six years of the deal: 5 or 6 percent in 2021, depending on pay grade; then 3 percent in 2023 and 3 percent in 2025. Lump sum payments, which do not raise base pay, would be made in the alternating years.

Thus, wage increases would average out to roughly 2 percent a year over the life of contract. The miserable character of the raises is all the more provocative given that it follows years of wage stagnation for Deere workers, while the company has been making billions, including record profits this year.

Chuck Browning, UAW Vice President for Ford, director of the union's Agricultural Implement Department and their head negotiator for the agreement with Deere, falsely claimed in the announcement last week that the contract contains "significant economic gains."

Browning, as well as his fellow bureaucrats heading

up the so-called "negotiations," are well compensated for their roles as pitchmen for the companies' demands. Browning received \$204,338 in compensation in 2020. Among others trumpeting the deal are UAW Region 8 Director Mitchell Smith (\$219,086), one of the architects of the betrayal of the Volvo Trucks strike earlier this year, and UAW Region 4 Director Ron McInroy (\$214,322).

The immediate reaction among workers who saw the contract summary was outrage, with calls for a rejection of the contract and strike action.

"This is what Deere comes back with?" a worker at one of Deere's facilities in Illinois said. "This is crazy, we deserve more. A \$3,500 signing bonus? Nobody wants that. More money, that's what the hell we want. We should have been on strike last week."

A worker from the John Deere Foundry Operations in Waterloo, Iowa said, "I think this is unacceptable!"

The contract proposal also contains significant attacks on future workers' retirement. Those hired after November 2021 are ineligible for pensions, among other changes, in effect creating a new tier of workers. In addition, the agreement includes vague language allowing the company to "pilot" changes to the CIPP productivity incentive system, which has long been used as a means to sweat out more production from workers.

There is no time to lose: Workers must organize to turn out to overwhelmingly and decisively vote down this insulting agreement this weekend.

A powerful rejection of the UAW-Deere deal is necessary, but only the first step. The UAW, having spent decades bargaining away workers' rights, will not respond to a "no" vote by seeking dramatic improvements to the contract. On the contrary, how it would react to a rejection was already shown in its

treacherous conduct at Volvo Trucks earlier this year. There, it responded to three massive “no” votes on its sweetheart agreements with Volvo by forcing workers to re-vote on the third deal they rejected, subsequently claiming it passed by just 17 votes.

The struggle must be taken out of the hands of the UAW, which functions as a representative of all its corporate partners. The urgent task is to expand the recently initiated Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee throughout all of Deere’s facilities. In addition, workers should send delegations to observe this weekend’s votes and ballot counts, in order to prevent any possibility of fraud on the part of UAW officials.

Having kept workers in the dark on its talks with Deere throughout the year, the UAW is moving to dump some 300 pages of dense, highly complicated contract language onto workers’ laps with less than three days to the vote. The UAW has faced calls from workers to release the full contract over the last week. Many remember the 2015 contract betrayal, in which the union sprang less than 20 pages of “highlights” on workers immediately before votes began.

A worker at the Des Moines plant told the WSW, “I want pre-1997 everything [i.e., the tier system ended and subsequent givebacks restored]. I’ve been working in many union shops since 1998. I was a part of the USW at Firestone and in the UAW 751 at Caterpillar. I’m a skilled machinist and have been in factory life back when most managers were wearing diapers. Let’s crush them all, Deere and the UAW. Let’s vote no!”

An Ottumwa production worker told the WSW: “Initial comments on this tentative agreement are comical and everyone is pretty much in disbelief that this is the offer they have spent two months collaborating on to bring back to ratification. If this is to pass it will be undoubtedly due to election fraud. Five percent raise is less than a one dollar an hour raise. Any fool can read a few sentences in and see that a multibillion-dollar company would like us to beg for some scraps and shut up about it!”

A Davenport Works worker said, “I have seen it and frankly I’m disgusted, both by the slap in the face that is this offer and also by the wholesale lack of transparency from the UAW.”

A worker at the Tractor, Cab, & Assembly Operations (TCAO) plant in Waterloo, Iowa, told the

WSWS, “The whole thing is a joke. I would be ashamed to bring that back to vote. I have 17 years in. I was looking forward to a four-week vacation with 20 years of experience, now will it be just an extra day? Do I lose the third week I have now? We need to strike!! I’m a second-generation JD worker!! I want what my dad got!! It’s our time!!”

Deere workers are in a powerful position to win their demands for substantial wage increases and the restoration of lost benefits. The company is flush with profits and is straining to hire and retain enough workers to keep up with orders for new equipment.

Moreover, Deere workers have powerful allies among other workers who are either on strike or have taken strike votes in the US and internationally recently, including tens of thousands of nurses and film workers in California, striking Kellogg’s workers in several states, and the 3,500 Dana auto parts workers who continue to work under a day-to-day contract extension enforced by the UAW and United Steelworkers union.

Everything depends on Deere workers taking the initiative and forming their own organizations, joining the growing movement of workers around the world against low wages and intolerable working conditions.

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