

Deere workers issue statement calling for strategy to win strike

John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee
14 October 2021

Over 10,000 workers in Iowa, Illinois, Kansas and other states began a strike at farm and heavy equipment maker Deere and Company at midnight early Thursday morning. The walkout follows workers' overwhelming rejection of a contract on Sunday backed by the United Auto Workers, which would have kept wage increases below inflation and eliminated pensions for new hires.

The recently formed John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued the following statement on Thursday calling for a strategy to expand and win the strike, and prevent another sellout by the UAW.

To learn more about joining the committee, Deere workers can email deerewrfc@gmail.com or text (484) 514-9797.

We need a strategy to win!

Organize rank-and-file strike committees at every plant!

Brothers and sisters at Deere:

Last night, we initiated one of the most significant labor struggles in a generation. By crushing Deere's insulting offer Sunday and launching this strike, we've taken critical steps forward, saying with one voice: The working class needs MORE!

For decades, we've seen one gain after the other stripped away by Deere and its millionaire executives, all for the benefit of them and their wealthy shareholders. Real wages have been driven down and health benefits and pensions slashed, while conditions in the plant have gotten worse and worse.

In all of these attacks, the UAW, the "union" that claims to represent us, has in fact aided the enemy. While workers have gotten poorer, the UAW bureaucrats grew richer.

It's clear the UAW never wanted a strike and were frantically trying to find a reason to call it off last night. If they weren't able to, it was only because Deere is dead set on its demands, and the UAW were afraid we would all walk out anyway if they tried another last-minute extension or agreement with their phony "significant gains."

But now the war has begun. What are the opposing sides,

and what are their strategy and aims?

First, Deere: They are planning to force white collar and salaried workers into scabbing in an attempt to keep parts flowing, particularly out of PDC in Milan. While it's a critical time for the company and they're vulnerable, with parts shortages, harvests, and equipment in high demand, they're also sitting on billions of dollars and are willing to use it and every dirty trick to fight us. Deere's bankrollers would rather see the company lose money in the short term in order to beat us. The corporate elite are terrified that if we win, we'd set an example that would spark a wave of strikes for higher wages and benefits.

Second, the UAW bureaucracy: The union executives have already shown their cards and which side they're on during the Volvo Trucks strike earlier this year. They plan to starve us on a trickle from their \$800 million strike fund, \$275 a week, which they won't even start releasing for another two weeks. They'll do everything they can to isolate us from other workers. Meanwhile, they'll keep conspiring behind closed doors with Deere, lying to us and waiting for the right time to try to slam a deal through that's essentially the same as what we already voted by 90 percent to reject, just like they did at Volvo. Like their corporate partners, the last thing the UAW wants is for us to win this strike.

On the other side from Deere and the UAW, there's us workers. We have already demonstrated our solidarity and determination in the contract vote. We've been getting ready for this fight long before last night. We know Deere's making billions, and we're not going to stop until we get what we need.

But in order to win, we must have a strategy, and we must have our own organizations to execute that strategy. We urge workers at every Deere plant to begin organizing rank-and-file committees in order to take control of our strike and prevent its sabotage by the UAW.

To succeed in a battle such as this, we must mobilize the necessary resources and reinforcements. This requires the following:

1. Full income for striking workers: The UAW

executives have no rightful claim to withhold the necessary funds to sustain our strike. \$275 a week for us, while hundreds of bureaucrats continue to take home their full six-figure salaries, is utterly unacceptable. Who decided to set it so low? Certainly not the rank and file. Deere workers must have strike pay to cover their full income! The strike fund was built with our dues and is rightfully ours and other workers'.

2. A strike by auto parts workers at Dana and the mobilization of workers throughout the auto industry:

To begin with, a walkout by our brothers and sisters at the supplier Dana would immediately strengthen the strike. They voted down a UAW contract by 90 percent last month, and are on day-to-day contract extensions. Why is the UAW (and the United Steelworkers) keeping them on the job? It only benefits Dana—and Deere, which Dana supplies—helping them stockpile parts. Dana even has former Deere executives on its corporate board. Autoworkers, Volvo workers, CAT workers, and others are also looking to fight for higher wages and better working conditions, and our struggles depend on each other's support and unity.

3. No more backroom “negotiations” and secret deals:

The secrecy surrounding the UAW's talks with Deere is designed to hide the fact that they're not demanding anything from the company, as last weekend's garbage contract showed. We're always the last to know what's been agreed to, and that's designed to put us at a disadvantage. We have a right to information and insist that rank-and-file workers have oversight over any talks between the UAW and the company.

4. No return to work until our demands are met: At Volvo, the UAW called off a two-week strike in the spring after claiming a deal with “significant gains” had been reached, without showing it to workers or holding a vote. Those significant gains turned out to be as worthless as the ones they tried to push on us. Workers must be on guard against any attempt by the UAW to rush through another rotten agreement that doesn't satisfy the needs of all sections of workers.

These are our minimum demands, and we are going to fight for them:

- An immediate end to the tier system, with the restoration of fully paid-for health care and pensions for all workers
- 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 retirees and their widows, with no co-pays or premiums
- The abolition of the CIPP productivity improvement regime, with base pay increased to ensure no loss of income

- Maintain the eight-hour day and keep current overtime rules

- Workers' oversight of safety protocols to stop the spread of COVID-19. The right to halt production and close the plant for full cleaning, with guaranteed compensation to workers for all missed time, if there are COVID outbreaks.

We're in a powerful position. However, Deere is a company with production facilities on virtually every continent. They are an old and cunning corporation, with substantial resources and experience in fighting their workers.

Deere has a global strategy, and so must we. We must appeal to our brothers and sisters at Deere in Mexico, Brazil, Germany, Russia, India and in other countries for support. If they learn about what we're standing up and fighting for, they will respond, because they face the same problems and have the same interests. Nothing keeps Deere executives up more at night than the thought of our strike spreading around the world.

The age of the UAW pulling fast ones on us has come to an end. But we can't wait for them to try another one. To make a real breakthrough and get what we need to lead dignified lives, every worker must take the initiative and help build up the network of rank-and-file committees throughout every plant and warehouse. Brothers and sisters, contact us to join our committee today!

To learn more about joining the committee, Deere workers can email deerewrfc@gmail.com or text (484) 514-9797.



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