

“I am glad that the Deere workers are standing strong and united. I back them 110 percent”

Autoworkers voice support for Deere strike as walkout enters third day

WSWS reporting team

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On October 14, over 10,000 workers at John Deere in the US walked off the job after overwhelmingly rejecting an agreement pushed by management and the United Auto Workers that amounted to a significant cut in real wages and eliminated pensions for new hires.

The strike is the first at Deere in 35 years and is expressive of a wave of working-class militancy after decades of stagnant or declining living standards. Farm equipment maker Deere and Company is a global corporation with profits approaching \$6 billion this year, well above its previous record.

For its part, the UAW has done everything to keep workers in the dark and isolate their struggle, acting at every step as accomplices of management. The UAW is above all concerned that the fight at Deere will link up with other sections of workers, such as parts workers at Dana and workers at the Detroit automakers who face similar issues.

Workers at Deere and Dana have initiated rank-and-file committees to oppose the pro-corporate maneuvers of the UAW and USW. The John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued a statement Thursday night calling for a strategy to win the strike, appealing for its expansion to Dana and the mobilization of workers throughout the auto industry.

Autoworkers speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* expressed their support for workers at Deere and connected their fight to the broader struggles of workers. Many praised the solidarity and strength from the action by the Deere workers, while raising words of caution about the inevitable attempts by the UAW to sabotage the

struggle.

“I was overjoyed to hear that Deere was on strike,” Travis, a worker at the Volvo Trucks New River Valley plant in Virginia, said.

“A word of caution, though. You are fighting not only the company but your bargaining team and the UAW Solidarity House. They will openly ignore the basics of the National Labor Relations Board requirements for collective bargaining and starve you out with fear and starvation wages in a reverse siege mentality. Depend on each other, help each other, ask your brothers and sisters for help to hold the line. The UAW will also purposely do a bad job of getting your loved ones the health care they are promised in an effort to whittle down your nerves and swing ‘yes’ votes.”

At Volvo’s New River Valley plant, workers carried out a heroic struggle against the UAW’s attempts to push through concessions earlier this year, voting down three contract proposals and twice going on strike, before the UAW forced a revote on its third deal with the company, claiming it passed by just 17 votes.

“We at Volvo failed to hold the line, but I believe you guys can get this done,” Travis continued. “Your machines are needed to keep the food supply of this nation and others growing and flowing; without them everyone, even the billionaire elites starve. So, know that you have ALL of the leverage. ALL.

“Don’t fear, help your struggling brothers and sisters with your extra food and money. And don’t be afraid to break ranks and talk to the press yourselves, because the UAW will try to keep this strike quiet like they did

with us in Dublin. They can't punish you for speaking your mind. I believe in y'all, and please reach out if there's anything any of us at Volvo Trucks can do to be of assistance to your people.

"But in closing, please KNOW that you ARE better, and deserve better. Don't accept anything less than improved working conditions and a wage increase that matches inflation. Because both the company and the UAW are going to try to put you through hell in the coming weeks. Don't give in. Hold the line."

A worker recently employed at Mack Trucks, which is also owned by the Volvo Group, responded enthusiastically to the Deere strike, saying, "I'm all for everyone striking all at once right freaking now! Every working person needs to start fighting for better pay, benefits, and a decent work/life balance at the least!"

A Ford worker at the Avon Lake, Ohio assembly plant reported that workers there had demanded that the union take up a collection at the plant to support the Deere workers but had encountered only silence.

Workers at auto parts maker Dana are following the strike by Deere workers very closely. The workers massively voted down a sellout agreement brought back by the UAW which did nothing to address unlimited amounts of overtime, and which contained a wage increase lower than the rate of inflation.

A Dana worker in Pottstown, Pennsylvania said, "I think it's about time all this is being addressed and brought to light. Dana and the UAW have been taking advantage of us for years. Offering us minimal wage increases while they make good profits from our hard work and long hours that go unappreciated.

"We need to join Deere in the strike deadline! We need to stand up to Dana and let them know we want, need, and deserve better! In these negotiations we are fighting for livable wages that reflect our true value to the company. The company is fighting to keep us financially deprived so we need extra hours, and we willingly give them underpaid labor so we can stay afloat in our personal lives. We are ready to fight."

At the Dana Driveline plant in Toledo, Ohio, workers have reported that management and the UAW are attempting to enforce a seven-day production schedule to stockpile parts even as COVID-19 cases spread in the plant. Last month, management teamed up with the UAW to fire Keaira Marsenburg, a well-known militant worker, in a bid to intimidate opposition. Several days

later, a worker was seriously injured in a forklift accident, highlighting the deplorable safety conditions at the plant that is a critical supplier of axles for Jeep products.

A Dana worker in Toledo said, "We need to come to an understanding of how powerful we are right now as far as solidarity among our union brothers and sisters. We need to go back to the old ways. There's strength in numbers.

"Right now, it's model year changeover, so they need us more than we need them. We can really put a dent in their bottom-line profit. These companies are showing their weakness right now, based on these situations."

Another worker at the Dana Toledo Driveline plant said, "I am glad that the Deere workers are standing strong and united. I back them 110 percent. I am glad that they are standing up. At least they are getting heard.

"We don't know anything here at Dana. The UAW keeps us in the dark. Today we just found out we are working Sunday.

"I can't believe that we are not on strike yet. They want to take away double time on Sundays and holidays. There are so many cases of COVID in our plant, it is terrible. If you take time off, you are fired. If you try to file a grievance, you are fired. I believe the UAW has sold us out. Our vote here [which rejected the UAW's deal by 100 percent] blew them away!"

"I hope they get what they want, and I hope Dana workers do, too. It's long past due," commented a Dana worker in Henderson, Kentucky, adding, "This extension each week is bull crap. That tells me the USW/UAW aren't like they used to be, but as long as they get their millions in pay they could care less."



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