The John Deere strike and the UAW's lies

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More than 10,000 John Deere agricultural and construction equipment workers completed their second day on strike Friday. Deere workers in Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Georgia and Colorado launched their first strike in 35 years after rejecting a tentative agreement backed by the United Auto Workers (UAW) by more than 90 percent.

The UAW-Deere contract repudiated by workers included a wage increase of 11–12 percent over six years, about two percent per year, resulting in a major cut in real wages when taking inflation into account. It would have also ended pensions for workers hired after November, adding a de facto third tier of workers to the current hated two-tier system accepted by the UAW in 1997.

As the company moves to hire scab workers, the UAW is working consciously and systematically to isolate and defeat the struggle. On early Thursday morning, UAW headquarters released a lying statement attempting to cover up its role as a conscious agent of corporate management.

The statement begins by declaring that the strike began "after the company failed to present an agreement that met our members' demands and needs. 'Our members at John Deere strike for the ability to earn a decent living, retire with dignity and establish fair work rules,' said Chuck Browning, vice president and director of the UAW's Agricultural Implement Department."

Does the UAW think that workers forgot what happened only last week? The "agreement" that "failed" to meet workers' demands was brought to workers by the UAW officials, who said at the time that the tentative agreement contained "significant economic gains." The workers refused to bow to the UAW's lies and threats. They voted with one voice to send the contract where it belonged, into the garbage bin.

Until the last minute, the UAW pleaded for a compromise from Deere to justify calling off the walkout, meeting with the company in closed-door talks throughout Wednesday.

The statement continues: "UAW President Ray Curry said 'The almost one million UAW retirees and active members stand in solidarity with the striking UAW members at John Deere.'"

In fact, the UAW is doing everything it can to isolate the Deere workers and prevent a broader mobilization. In particular, along with the United Steelworkers, it is keeping 3,500 auto parts workers at Dana Incorporated, one of the major suppliers for Deere, on the job under a day-to-day contract extension, after workers rejected a union-backed agreement by 90 percent in late August and early September.

A Dana worker in Tennessee told the WSWS. "The John Deere workers have our support. 'Why can't we go on strike like they are' is something I hear all the time."

Workers have told the WSWS that the UAW is spreading the word that a "new" tentative agreement has been reached at Dana, no doubt as bad or worse than the one that they rejected. Precisely at the point when a joint struggle of Dana and Deere workers would enormously strengthen both, the UAW is seeking to ram through a contract at Dana to increase the pressure on workers at Deere to give in.

The UAW statement adds: "Curry noted that, 'UAW John Deere members have worked through the pandemic after the company deemed them essential, to produce the equipment that feeds America, builds America and powers the American economy.'"

Deere and other workers "worked through the pandemic" because the UAW forced them to. When auto workers in Detroit and Canada walked off the job during the early stages of the pandemic in March 2020, it was the UAW that worked with the companies to

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ensure the full reopening of plants by the summer, fueling the massive surge of the pandemic in the latter half of last year.

A Dana worker from Toledo told the WSWS that the deadly virus is “spreading like wildfire” in the plant. In Auburn Hills, Michigan, Dana workers reported that the spread of COVID-19 was so bad that a mask mandate was reinstated.

The statement concludes by quoting Mitchell Smith, UAW Region 8 director, as asserting, “Strikes are never easy on workers or their families, but John Deere workers believe they deserve a better share of the pie, a safer workplace, and adequate benefits.”

The UAW is doing everything it can to ensure that the economic impact of the strike on workers is as severe as possible, to try to force them to accept a deal through economic blackmail.

Deere workers are being starved on the picket with $275 a week in strike pay, which will not even begin for two weeks. They paid the same to 3,000 striking Volvo Trucks workers in June in an attempt to crush the rebellion of workers who voted down three pro-company contracts backed by the UAW.

The $275 a week is less than the federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour, lower than the poverty guideline for a household of two. Meanwhile, the UAW is flush with money. According to the UAW’s 2020 LM-2 filing with the Labor Department, the UAW has net assets of over $1.1 billion and a strike fund of $790 million. As Deere workers are starved on the picket lines, UAW bureaucrats receive full pay, with hundreds of officials receiving six-figure salaries.

Despite the claims of pseudo-left organizations, such as the Democratic Socialists of America and *Labor Notes*, the UAW, like all so-called “unions” of today, is not a workers' organization, but a labor police force working on behalf of management. The UAW’s executives, with incomes that place them in the top 5 percent of the population, are completely detached from and opposed to the needs of workers they lyingly claim to represent.

Deere workers are in a position of immense strength. They are part of a globally integrated working class that is entering into struggle in the US and internationally. Workers across the world, from thousands of nurses and health care workers in western New York to more than 150,000 steel and metal workers in South Africa, are on strike. Deere itself is a multinational corporation, with operations around the globe, and it is part of a global supply chain involving millions more workers, including the workers at Dana.

The mobilization of this collective strength requires the formation of independent organizations of working class struggle. Deere workers have taken an important first step in the formation of the John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee. This committee must be expanded, with strike committees set up at every Deere plant and warehouse, in order to link up with Dana workers, autoworkers and Deere workers internationally in a common offensive of the entire working class.

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