

Australian workers support John Deere strike in the US

Our correspondents
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Workers, students and young people in Australia have issued strong statements of support for more than 10,000 John Deere workers in the United States, who are carrying out a courageous strike.

The stoppage is part of a wave of industrial action in the US and internationally, as workers increasingly break out of the mechanisms that have been used by governments, the employers and the unions to suppress the class struggle during the past forty years.

While John Deere's stock price has doubled since 2019, on the back of record profits, the company intends to reward workers with a pay "rise" that is well below the rate of inflation and attacks conditions. Workers have overwhelmingly rejected this rotten deal, pushed by the United Auto Workers (UAW) union, which is working to isolate and defeat the struggle.

In Australia, the unions, together with the corporate media, have said nothing about the John Deere stoppage. They are seeking to keep workers in the dark, and have abruptly halted a series of strikes by truck drivers, dockworkers and others, before ramming through sell-out deals.

When workers in Australia were apprised of the John Deere strike by the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party, they immediately recognised its international significance and close connection to their own struggles.

The following resolution was passed unanimously at a meeting of Socialist Equality Party electoral members on Sunday:

- This meeting of SEP Australia Electoral Members, held on October 17, 2021, gives its full support to the 10,000 John Deere agricultural and construction equipment workers, who went on strike last Thursday for the first time in 35 years.

- Over 90 percent of workers voted to reject a union-backed agreement, which cut real wages and put an end to pensions for all workers hired after November, effectively creating a three-tier workforce, after the United Auto Workers (UAW) accepted a two-tier system in 1997. The UAW is attempting to isolate the strike, refusing to allow strike action by 3,500 Dana Incorporated auto parts workers, despite repeated statements by workers in favour of a strike.

- This action is part of a global resurgence of the class struggle. It includes Coles warehouse workers in Australia, who voted overwhelmingly to reject union-management deals that likewise attack workers' conditions, as well as workers at General Mills and McCormick Foods, who courageously struck for weeks before being sold out by the United Workers Union.

- We fully endorse the decision of John Deere workers to form a rank-and-file committee, in order to conduct the strike outside of the hands of the unions. We call on other workers to form similar committees, as part of the International Workers' Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Kirsten Burns, a worker from Adelaide, South Australia, a former auto manufacturing hub, wrote:

As more than 10,000 autoworkers at 14 John Deere plants in the United States battle the multinational corporation in a wage and benefits dispute, the union that represents them, the UAW, is working hand in glove with the corporation to shut down the strike.

Presenting an agreement to John Deere workers, the union falsely claimed that it contained economic benefits for the workers, when the opposite is the case. The agreement was soundly rejected, with strike action called—for the first time in over thirty-five years.

As John Deere plans to bring in scab workers, the union is working to isolate the struggle and see it

defeated.

Workers have formed the John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee, independent of the union, as a first step to break from the conscious agents of corporate management.

I support the initiative of the John Deere Workers and urge the millions of Auto Workers internationally to join with those in the US struggle; to set up their own Rank and File Committees, in a common offensive of the working class against the attacks taking place now and against those to come.

Zach Diotte, a student and former windmill factory worker in Sydney, wrote:

We are watching intently, as are workers internationally, the workers' movements brewing in the United States. You are courageously fighting both the John Deere corporation and the treacherous UAW and are leading the way forward in the workers struggle by establishing a rank-and-file committee.

You have many friends, not just in the factories of Illinois, but the world over. Whether your demands are met or not, you must fight. The stand that you, as well as the workers at Dana and Volvo put up, will inspire and set precedents for the coming struggles. Every show of strength by you is a symbol to the working class of its power. But you cannot fight in isolation. Spread the word far and wide, and link up with your class brothers and sisters—if unified, the working class will move mountains.

The **Postal Workers Rank-and-File Committee** wrote:

The **PWRFC** fully supports the 10,000 workers at John Deere in the US who walked off the job after overwhelmingly rejecting an agreement pushed by management and the United Auto Workers. The agreement amounts to a significant cut in real wages and would eliminate pensions for new hires.

The UAW's attempt to ram through a sell-out deal at John Deere is a familiar situation for many workers. For decades, unions all over the world have lined up with management to sabotage every attempt by workers to fight for their interests.

At Australia Post and throughout the country, the unions have enforced the destruction of tens of thousands of permanent full-time jobs. Now, casual and contract workers are increasingly forced to work for up to 14 hours a day, as many as seven days a week. If

they raise issues of safety or take a day off to rest, their contract can be immediately terminated.

The pathetic \$275-a-week strike pay, which you will not receive for another two weeks, is not enough. You should be getting your full pay from the union strike fund for the length of the strike.

The UAW is attempting to isolate you and, by applying economic pressure, force you back under the company's terms. The unions have become transformed into pro-company organisations; they no longer fight for workers' interests in even the smallest way.

In this context, the decision by John Deere workers to establish their own rank-and-file committee is extremely important. It is only through such committees, operating independently of the trade union bureaucracy, that the struggle can go forward.

Attempts by management and the union to keep workers in the dark must be fought. All workers must be fully informed about what is going on in the negotiations. Open, democratic discussion must be welcomed and encouraged.

The John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee will provide information and a perspective not only to John Deere workers, but throughout the US and around the world. John Deere workers should draw strength and courage from the knowledge that they are part of a worldwide fightback of the working class.

We support your struggle and call on our brothers and sisters across Australia and around the world to join us in this critical fight.



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