

“Without international unity, we can’t achieve anything”

John Deere workers in Mannheim, Germany, support striking workers in US

Our reporters
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The week-long strike by over 10,000 workers at agricultural and construction equipment manufacturer John Deere in the United States is being met with enthusiasm by their brothers and sisters at Deere facilities in Germany.

A reporting team from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke Tuesday with John Deere workers in Mannheim, the site of Deere’s European headquarters and Germany’s largest tractor factory with 2,800 employees. The universal response of workers was, “Of course, I support my American colleagues in their job action.”

IG Metall, Germany’s largest and best-financed trade union has failed to inform Deere workers in Germany and Europe about the strike by their American colleagues against cuts in real wages and attacks on pensions. The strike began after workers voted down by 90 percent a concessions contract pushed by the United Auto Workers (UAW). IG Metall has a “Transatlantic Partnership” with the UAW.

Despite the information blackout, some workers in Mannheim have informed themselves through social media about the strike in the US. Others first learned about the struggle from WSWs campaigners who passed out leaflets with information about the strike. The Mannheim workers responded with strong support and solidarity. A worker who has acquaintances at Deere in the US told the WSWs, “They have to stand up for their rights. They’re right and they should carry on what they’re doing.”

The struggle by US workers against raging inflation are readily understood by Deere workers in the German assembly plants. “Prices are rising here too, such as for petrol or heating,” said a worker. Less and less of the

salary is left at the end of the month, the worker continued, while investors and shareholders enrich themselves.

Another worker, who referred to a recent report on world hunger, pointed to the criminality of giant agribusinesses like Cargill, whose former executive sits on Deere’s corporate board of directors. “Hunger is on the rise, and in the 21st century, and the capitalists rake in billions! It is high time for the workers to take to the streets,” he said.

Amidst the global pandemic, Deere netted \$1.22 billion in profits during the first quarter of 2021, doubling its income from a year earlier. The company expects a record profit of \$5 billion for the year, which it apparently intends to secure by forcing cuts in real wages in the US. Deere’s investors include the billionaires Warren Buffett and Bill Gates, whose wealth has grown by more than 20 percent during the pandemic.

To grow its profits and enrich its investors, Deere is stepping up pressure on its workforce on both sides of the Atlantic. In Mannheim, around 1,000 jobs have been cut over the past decade from the 3,760 employees who worked at the plant in 2011. At the same time, the company has increased the use of outside contractors and temporary workers who have no job protections and can be laid off at will.

Outside the factory—where a new tractor rolls off the assembly line every three minutes—several workers, like Christian, expressed their solidarity in English, “Hey guys, keep on going. I’m with you!”

Many workers also posed to have their photo taken while holding up a WSWs poster reading, “John Deere workers in Germany support the fight in the US.”

Javus, who has worked at Deere for 30 years, said, “They should certainly keep at it. Without international unity, we can’t achieve anything.”

Another Mannheim worker commented, “I read your leaflet from beginning to end, and everything in it is right. Our colleagues are absolutely right to strike, and they have my support.”

The statement distributed by the WSWs team placed the Deere strike in the context of the ruling elites’ criminal response to the pandemic and its efforts to make the working class bear the social and economic costs of the crisis. The strike wave in the US, campaigners explained, was a new stage in the global class struggle.

The Deere strike in the US is the first in 35 years. In Germany, IG Metall has only called out Deere workers on short “warning strikes,” but never any real strike that threatened the company’s bottom line. As in the US, IG Metall and other German and European unions stand on the other side of the barricades and represent the interests of the companies, not workers.

That is why Deere workers in the US have established the John Deere Rank-and-File Committee independently of the UAW. Similar committees must be built at all Deere locations internationally to mobilize global support for the strike in the US. The only way to take on a global company, with nearly 70,000 workers in 30 countries, is by organizing an international counteroffensive by workers to prioritize their needs, wages, and jobs over the accumulation of corporate profits. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees has been formed to coordinate this struggle across national boundaries. Contact the WSWs for more information on building rank-and-file committees.



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