

“A deer is fast and quick. But us brothers and sisters are lions”

Workers oppose Deere's strikebreaking efforts, voice determination to fight

George Gallanis
22 October 2021

On Friday, John Deere workers entered their eighth day of strike against agricultural and construction equipment manufacturer John Deere. Since workers walked out over a week ago, the United Auto Workers (UAW) has worked in a determined manner to isolate the struggle. Despite this, workers continue to show strong determination to resist.

The more than 10,000 Deere workers in Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Georgia and Colorado launched their first strike in 35 years after rejecting a tentative agreement backed by the UAW by a more than 90 percent margin. The proposed six-year UAW-Deere contract would have kept wages well below inflation while eliminating pensions for new workers.

In an apparent retreat, on Friday, Deere announced it would not cut off health care to striking workers and would continue to pay workers for the CIPP productivity incentive scheme. Workers previously told the WSWS the company was planning to cut off both.

The move by Deere mirrors that of General Motors during the 2019 strike of 48,000 autoworkers in the United States. Ultimately, such moves are not an act of charity on the part of Deere's executives, but function as a maneuver to smooth the way for the UAW union to end the strike and impose the company's demands.

A Deere worker from Ottumwa told the WSWS, “Health insurance was to end on October 27th. Deere was also holding the last CIPP checks that should have gone out. Pressure must have gotten to them. They're paying employees what is owed, and continuing insurance for striking workers. I believe this is only for workers that have not been recently hired and are still on.”

The worker added, “It's a David-Goliath issue in

many eyes. It's time for executives to realize they can't make anything without workers. Deere can't make anything without workers pointing out mistakes and telling them how to fix them.”

According to local UAW officials, talks between the union and the company resumed on Monday. The UAW released no information about the contents of the meeting and has since then kept working entirely in the dark about subsequent meetings. This is because these are not negotiations between two antagonistic parties, but a strategy session to discuss how to weaken the resistance of workers before trying to ram through another pro-company contract.

On Wednesday, Tom Vilsack, the US secretary of agriculture, appeared at a Deere workers' picket line. His appearance reflected the growing anxiety within the Biden administration about the strike and the desire to bring it to an end as soon as possible. The unprecedented move is a calculated political maneuver by the Biden administration, which is marketing itself as the most “pro-union” presidency in US history, to prop up the unions, and in particular the UAW, under conditions of a mounting rank-and-file rebellion against these right-wing organizations. The Biden administration is fully aware of the mass anger felt by workers toward the UAW and fears a rebellion outside the unions could ignite a larger strike movement.

On the day of Vilsack's appearance, Chief Judge Marlita Greve, a pro-business judge appointed by Vilsack when he was Iowa governor, granted Deere an injunction against striking workers at its plant in Davenport, Iowa. The ruling bans the use of chairs and fire barrels, a standard feature at picket lines for decades. Meanwhile, UAW Local 281 in Davenport

posted a statement on Facebook Thursday telling workers to obey the order without making any criticisms of it. The meek submission by the UAW to Deere's outrageous legal moves only confirms its determination to strangle the strike.

Meanwhile, as Deere workers continue their strike, the UAW has kept 3,500 workers at Dana, a large parts supplier to the auto industry and to Deere, on the job more than six weeks after they rejected a pro-company contract pushed by the UAW and the United Steelworkers by a margin of over 90 percent. The UAW and USW are now attempting to force workers to accept another concessionary contract.

Despite the attempts by the UAW and company to sabotage the strike, workers have voiced their determination to keep fighting.

A Deere worker from Des Moines said workers were striking to win back substantial gains after years of UAW-backed concessions. He said, "I want at least an \$8,000 ratification bonus. Ten percent raise each year of the six-year contract. That's a 60 percent raise over 6 years at the minimum. We also expect to retain our health care benefits and we currently want a \$2,000 per month pension for an employee with 20 years of service if they retire. Ten percent each decade of service. Thirty years should be a \$3,000 per month pension.

"Currently, if you get 30 years of service at Deere in 2021 you get a \$900 pension per month. Tax it and you get \$600 per month. It's not as appealing as Deere lets on.

"And no tier-two pay and benefits for new hires; we are not trying to sell out the new employees.

"I told folks today at the hall: A deer is fast and quick. But us brothers and sisters are lions. They can run, but not long without being caught. Look at what lions feast off of in Africa."

A Deere worker from Dubuque told the WSWS, "If you told me a couple of months ago that labor was going to rise up, I wouldn't have believed you. But now anything is possible. Everything is possible when the working class stands up and fights.

"Now you watch the politicians trying to show support or dance around like they do. But they don't care about us. They're bought and paid for by Wall Street. What they want is this strike to be over.

"Deere is massive for the Iowa and Illinois economy.

It's also massive for the American economy. Deere is also deeply connected to the agricultural economy. There's a lot of money on the line.

"The politicians don't want this strike. They want to smooth things out and end it."

To fight against the collusion between the UAW and the company and organize a struggle for sizable improvements and wages and benefits, workers formed the John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee earlier this month. The committee has demanded that resources be deployed to place the strike on a serious footing, including full income for striking workers from the UAW's \$700 million-plus strike fund, an end to the secrecy surrounding the union's talks with Deere, the calling of a strike at Dana, and the mobilization of workers throughout the auto industry in a common fight.

To learn more about joining the John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee, Deere workers can email deerewrfc@gmail.com or text (484) 514-9797.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact