

Anger grows among Deere workers over UAW's plans for poverty strike pay

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As John Deere workers complete their 11th day on strike Monday, dissatisfaction and frustration is growing over the delay in strike pay from the United Auto Workers union (UAW) and the inadequate level of funds being offered. Deere workers will only be paid \$275 beginning the third week of the strike, which is less than the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour.

The more than 10,000 striking Deere workers in Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Georgia and Colorado rejected a tentative agreement backed by the UAW by a more than 90 percent margin on October 10. The six-year agreement backed by the union and company included raises below current inflation rates and the removal of pensions for new workers.

“This \$275 a week isn’t enough,” a Deere worker in Waterloo, Iowa, told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. “People are asking when we’re going to get our first check. Them holding out like this is going to cause a lot of issues for people who need to make car payments and rent payments and so on.”

The low level of strike pay planned for workers is not because the UAW apparatus is hurting financially. According to the union’s LM-2 filing with the Labor Department, the UAW had net assets of over \$1.1 billion in 2020 and a strike fund of \$790 million, built with workers’ dues money.

The poverty pay given to striking Deere workers does not mean the UAW bureaucrats will stop receiving their paychecks. On the contrary, as Deere workers are starved on the picket lines, hundreds of UAW officials will continue receiving their full six-figure salaries.

In 2018, UAW international officers awarded themselves 30 percent pay increases at the union’s quadrennial convention. In 2020, as COVID-19 ravaged plants and factories, UAW President Rory Gamble received the top pay of \$244,772 in salary and expenses. Number two was Ray Curry, then secretary-treasurer and

current UAW president, at \$236,608. The 17 top UAW officers grossed more than \$200,000 last year.

While striking workers will receive only \$275, hundreds of officials at the misnamed “Solidarity House” headquarters will continue receiving paychecks averaging in the thousands of dollars a week.

- Based on his 2020 base salary of \$210,000, which has likely increased substantially since he became president, Ray Curry’s weekly pay will be roughly \$4,000.

- Chuck Browning, vice president for Ford, head of the UAW’s Agricultural Equipment Department and lead UAW “negotiator” in the Deere talks, will also have a weekly paycheck nearing \$4,000, based on comparable salaries for other UAW VPs, which averaged about \$204,000 in 2020.

- UAW Region 8 Director Mitchell Smith, also on the UAW–Deere bargaining team and a key architect of the sellout contract at Volvo earlier this year, had a reported salary close to \$190,000 in 2020, meaning a weekly check of around \$3,500.

The officially reported incomes of UAW executives and “international reps” are just one portion of the privileges and wealth accruing to these upper-middle-class layers. According to the Labor Department filing, in 2020 the UAW spent millions on the following: \$80,275,893 for payments and financial “disbursements” to the more than 600 individuals on the UAW’s national payroll; \$65,345,391 for cash paid on new investments; \$19,855 for improvements on their Black Lake golf course; \$35,531 for rooms and catering at Motor City Casino in Detroit; and \$27,997 for a conference at Sinatra Beach Resort in St. Petersburg, Florida. These, of course, constitute only the “over-the-table” expenditures.

Meanwhile, workers are being forced to tap savings accounts and take side jobs to get by, provoking growing indignation.

The Deere worker from Waterloo continued, “The idea

of starving us out is happening, and it's a lot quicker than I thought it would be. To be honest, I just feel like there are way too many small flaws in this system and people are starting to crack the happy face that the union is putting on for Facebook."

A Deere worker from Moline, Illinois, said, "Strike pay doesn't start until October 28. It has been hard not getting a paycheck. My situation may be a little different than others' cause I work a side job on a regular basis because the money isn't enough. I do believe UAW leadership should not be collecting a check until the rank-and-file are back at work."

Another Deere worker from Waterloo commented on the UAW's history of corruption, saying, "I am a 17-year dues-paying union member. Remember they borrowed from the strike fund for Denis Williams's condo box at Black Lake! Now he's in jail."

The UAW is intent on ending the strike as swiftly as possible. As it did with striking Volvo workers, the UAW wants to pay workers as little as possible to pressure them into accepting a concessionary contract out of financial desperation that meets the demands of Deere's shareholders. At the same time, it is keeping workers in the dark on what it is discussing with the company, while attempting to isolate the strike from other workers in the auto and auto parts industries, such as at Dana Inc.

After Dana parts workers voted "no" by 90 percent on a first UAW and United Steelworkers sellout contract in late September and early October, the unions did not call them out on strike, instead keeping them on the job for weeks under a day-to-day contract extension. The unions are now seeking to ram through another sellout deal to prevent Dana and Deere workers uniting, which is exactly what needs to be done.

In their fight, Deere workers confront not just the company as their opponent, but also the UAW, which has long functioned as an implement of management, forcing through one concession after another, aiding the corporation in enacting the tier system and substantially reducing wages and benefits.

On the first day of the Deere strike, the John Deere Rank-and-File Committee published the statement, "Deere workers issue statement calling for strategy to win strike." In it, the committee issued the following demand:

Full income for striking workers: The UAW executives have no rightful claim to withhold the necessary funds to sustain our strike. \$275 a week

for us, while hundreds of bureaucrats continue to take home their full six-figure salaries, is utterly unacceptable. Who decided to set it so low? Certainly not the rank-and-file. Deere workers must have strike pay to cover their full income! The strike fund was built with our dues and is rightfully ours and other workers'.

Despite the UAW's efforts to keep Deere strikers isolated and place them under significant financial pressure, workers remain in a combative mood, determined to wring what they need from Deere. "I think most are fed up and will not fold," a Deere worker in Georgia said. "I think this goes through Thanksgiving. I heard Deere is losing \$30 million a day during the strike. We will not cave."

The Deere strike can and must be won. But as with every serious struggle, it requires a strategy and organizations to mobilize the necessary resources and reinforcements.

Rank-and-file strike committees must be initiated at every Deere plant and facility, linking up with the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee, to share information, break through the UAW blackout, and mobilize support among workers in the US and in other countries. In Mannheim, Germany, Deere workers voiced their solidarity for their brothers and sisters in the US upon learning of the strike. Deere workers must appeal to other workers at Dana, Volvo, Caterpillar and the broader auto industry around the world to join up in a common fight and go on the offensive.

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



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