

UAW announces “new” tentative agreement with Deere, seeking to ram through vote on Tuesday

Marcus Day
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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.

The United Auto Workers is seeking to ram through a tentative agreement with Deere and shut down the strike by Deere workers without giving workers a chance to study the contract.

On Saturday morning, the UAW and agricultural and construction equipment giant Deere announced that they had reached a “new” agreement for a six-year contract that would cover over 10,000 workers in Illinois, Iowa and Kansas, as well as a separate deal that would cover roughly 100 workers in Georgia and Colorado.

The UAW is seeking to accomplish what it failed to do earlier in October: force workers to accept a pro-company contract that fails to meet workers’ demands for substantial improvements to wages and benefits.

In a curt text message to workers, the UAW stated that it has already scheduled ratification votes for Tuesday, just three days away: “We have reached a tentative agreement. Ratification meeting will begin Tuesday at 10AM. Information on venue and logistics coming soon.”

UAW Local 838 in Waterloo, Iowa stated on its Facebook page that electronic copies of contract “highlighters” would be released Sunday, just two days before the vote.

Workers must oppose this blatant effort to stampede them into accepting a contract they’ve been told nothing about! At stake is not just the fate of current workers over the next six years, but the livelihoods of the next generation and countless retirees.

The demand must be raised at every plant and

warehouse that the UAW release the full contract language immediately, as well as all side letters, and provide workers with at least a week to study it.

If the UAW attempts to proceed with the ratification votes on Tuesday, workers should reject the contract on principle. Any vote under such circumstances would be a mockery of democracy and a repeat of the UAW’s sellout in 2015, when it rammed through a deal with numerous concessions, forcing workers to vote on the basis of highly selective “highlights” it released as ratification meetings began.

Workers are already responding with suspicion to the announcement of the deal and determination to hold firm in their demands. A worker from Waterloo, Iowa told the WSW, “It’s too quick in my opinion! They want to ram it down.”

Since workers courageously rejected the UAW’s first concessionary contract proposal—which would have kept raises below inflation and eliminated pensions for new hires—by 90 percent on October 10, the union bureaucracy has been doing everything in its power to curtail and ultimately sabotage the Deere workers’ struggle.

First, the UAW attempted to avoid a walkout and secure some sort of fig leaf of a compromise from Deere, delaying a strike deadline until October 13. But with Deere digging in on its demands for concessions in wages and benefits, and sentiment among workers overwhelmingly in favor of a fight, the UAW felt it had no choice but to call a strike.

However, the UAW has been conducting the strike with the same treacherous strategy it employed during the 2019 General Motors and Mack Trucks strikes and the strike at Volvo Trucks earlier this year.

Second, the UAW has kept workers entirely in the dark on what it has been discussing with Deere. Since the beginning of the strike, workers have received no information from the UAW.

Third, it has kept Deere workers isolated from other sections of workers who are fighting to overturn similar concessions in wages and working conditions, such as the 3,500 workers at auto parts maker Dana, Inc., which is a major supplier of Deere. The UAW is now pushing a deal at Deere after having seemingly forced through a sellout agreement at Dana over the last week, which maintains the brutally long mandatory overtime hours workers are subjected to.

Lastly, the UAW has been starving Deere workers on the picket line, not issuing any strike pay until the last few days, when it began to hand out its meager \$275 weekly checks, out of a total strike fund exceeding \$700 million. The aim of the UAW executives, who have continued to receive their bloated six-figure salaries during the strike, is to impoverish strikers and create sufficient economic desperation to enable them to force through the company's terms.

Deere, for its part, while relying on the efforts of its "partners" in the UAW bureaucracy to prepare another sellout, has been taking aggressive measures against striking workers. The company began deploying strikebreakers on the first day of the strike, hoping to maintain the flow of parts to its dealers, while also seeking court injunctions in order to cripple workers' pickets.

Under such circumstances, there is every reason to believe that the UAW and Deere are seeking to push a contract which is simply a rehash of their initial agreement.

Deere's intransigent hostility to workers' demands has already resulted in one preventable tragedy, with a worker from the company's parts distribution center in Milan, Illinois, Richard Rich, killed while crossing a highway near pickets in the pre-dawn hours Wednesday morning.

The strike by Deere workers has garnered enormous support within the working class and broader population, with many workers carefully watching the struggle, inspired and hoping that finally there will be a breakthrough after decades of falling wages and living standards. This support has extended internationally, with Deere workers in Mannheim, Germany, voicing

their solidarity with striking workers in the US.

To oppose the pro-company maneuvers of the UAW, workers formed the John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee earlier this month. In its statement calling for a strategy to win the strike, the committee demanded full income for striking workers out of the UAW's fund, an end to the secrecy surrounding its talks with the company, and the mobilization of workers at Dana, Caterpillar, and throughout the auto industry in order to strengthen the struggle.

The outcome of the struggle must not be left in the hands of the corrupt UAW bureaucrats, who are completely in the pocket of Deere and the other corporations! As many workers recognize, there may never be a more favorable opportunity to win substantial gains for themselves and future generations.

Workers must take the initiative and exert their collective will. This requires the formation of rank-and-file strike committees throughout every plant and warehouse, linking up with the Deere Rank-and-File Committee and workers at Volvo, Mack, Dana and in the auto industry, in order to prepare a mass movement to secure workers' rights and interests.

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