Autoworkers voice support for Deere strikers, warn of UAW treachery: “Hold out as long as you can”

Our reporters
1 November 2021

All eyes are on the contract vote Tuesday at agricultural and construction equipment maker Deere and Company. The United Auto Workers is seeking to force workers to vote on a second tentative agreement which had only been announced on Saturday, without giving them copies of the deal or time to study it. Approximately 10,000 workers have been striking for close to three weeks after voting down the first contract proposal on October 10 by 90 percent.

The latest TA again fails to meet workers’ demands for raises large enough to make up for 25 years of wage cuts and the restoration of retiree health benefits and pensions for all workers which were bargained away by the UAW in 1997. The attempts to ram through the deal only two days after releasing selective “highlights” has provoked widespread opposition among Deere workers.

The Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee, formed by workers earlier in October to organize opposition to the efforts of the UAW to enforce new concessions, issued a statement Sunday night urging workers to oppose the union’s attempted blackmail and instead expand the strike to win workers’ demands.

The struggle at Deere and the outcome of the vote on Tuesday is being closely watched by many workers in the US and in other countries, including Deere retirees. Gordy, a **retired Deere worker in Minneapolis, Minnesota**, wrote to the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* and said, “Keep a close watch on your union reps, they are as bad as the company at selling out the workers. I was a member for 30 years at the Minneapolis, Minnesota, warehouse. I was a part of the 1986 strike. Good luck.”

“The fact that the IUAW is still not supplying the workers with nothing more than fake contract highlights and zero time to study much of anything is absolutely criminal,” a veteran worker at **Stellantis (formerly Fiat Chrysler) in Kokomo, Indiana**, said.

He continued, “It’s apparent that the UAW has not been penalized by the Justice Department, nor has the IUAW ‘been scared straight.’ It goes to show you that the Justice Department’s recent [corruption probe] was a big show. They only did so to appease the workers and public and to lull the public back to sleep while the corporations and bureaucrats continue stripping the workers of what little we had left.”

The worker warned about the danger of the UAW bureaucracy attempting to rig the vote and encouraged rank-and-file Deere workers to find ways to monitor the balloting. “Better get control of the ballot boxes. Go back and look at the FCA 2019 contract vote totals at each local. I don’t think a single local had anywhere close to 50 percent turnout—according to the totals. But I don’t know of anyone who didn’t vote.”

He concluded, “The rank and file ought to have designated counters at each voting site. They don’t have to know how everyone voted, but just the total number of votes. Like exit polling.”

Upon learning of the UAW’s attempt to hold a ratification vote just two days after releasing its “highlights,” Travis, a worker at **Volvo Trucks**, said, “Wow... I’m stunned. They really think y’all are stupid enough to fall for this. Our UAW leadership at Volvo was corrupt and gave the company nearly everything they wanted... But they at least had to allow for seven days to the next vote. I’d vote no just because of the two-day time frame.”

Volvo Trucks workers also drew parallels between the UAW’s maneuvers at Deere and their own experience. Earlier this year, nearly 3,000 workers repeatedly rejected UAW-backed concessions contracts and launched a five-

© World Socialist Web Site

week strike, voting down the first two proposals by 90 percent or more, and a third by 60 percent. However, the UAW defied the will of workers and forced a re-vote on the already rejected third TA, which they then dubiously claimed passed by just 17 votes, ending the strike.

A member of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee expressed his hope the contract at Deere would be rejected. “I’d say it will be voted down. They’re doing exactly what they did with Volvo. The inflation on a six-year contract will degrade your wages just like ours.”

Workers at Dana, Incorporated—an auto parts company which is a major supplier to Deere—also issued warnings to Deere workers. The UAW and USW defied a 90 percent “no” vote by Dana workers on a concessions agreement earlier this fall, keeping them working under day-to-day contract extensions for more than a month and a half to allow the company to stockpile parts and complete the critical changeover to production for next year’s vehicle models. Last week, using similar tactics the UAW is using at Deere, the unions pushed through a deal which maintained grueling mandatory overtime rules, preyed upon the financial insecurity of workers by “sweetening” it with a higher signing bonus, and frontloaded wage increases which will then be eroded by inflation.

A **Dana worker in Fort Wayne, Indiana**, said, “The company doesn’t give a damn about you, only what you do for them. Hold out as long as you can make them feel a financial burden the same way they do to you.

“They sold us out. Used scare tactics on people. Things like, ‘If you don’t vote yes the company will pack up and go overseas or to Canada,’ or, ‘This is the best you’re gonna get, might as well just accept it.’

“We deserve better than what was offered. We are Dana, and without us there is no Dana.”

A worker at **Stellantis’ Sterling Heights Assembly Plant** near Detroit said, “In reading the article on the tentative agreement between UAW and Deere, one only has to look at the contract [UAW Vice President Cindy] Estrada made with Fiat Chrysler in 2019. It was passed systematically and purposely, by dividing the membership—and throwing a fastball by them with a highlight package that left out MANY facts—including language which allowed them to implement a new 84-hour work week for skilled trades with essentially no paid overtime. Estrada is a paid-off mouthpiece for big companies. She and the bargaining committee should be in jail—not at the table.

“It was the divide and conquer mentality of the union against the workers that really sealed the deal [at FCA in 2019]. Production workers were baited with bonuses right before Christmas. The [workers that did vote for it] were fooled by the highlights. Here we are now, 180 years backward for the labor movement. It’s absolutely absurd that it could be considered ‘good faith.’”

A worker at **Ford’s Chicago Assembly Plant** addressed himself to Deere workers and said, “You give a good fight. In all my years with the UAW we never got more than the highlights of the new contract. You will only know the full impact of this contract this time next year when the UAW gives out the books of language. I personally would still vote no.

“I don’t know what they are offering you, but a six-year contract is not good for you or any UAW member. I know that the Big Three contract is coming up soon, and I’m afraid that the UAW is going to try to make us take a six-year deal. A six-year contract is no good, you will be locked in. NO, NO, NO to a six-year deal.”

Marcia Walters, whose husband Danny Walters tragically died after suffering a seizure on the assembly line at a Dana, Inc. plant in Dry Ridge, Kentucky, earlier this year, expressed her solidarity with Deere workers.

“I read about the Deere worker who died on the picket line,” she said. Richard Rich, a veteran worker at the company’s Milan, Illinois, parts distribution center, died in the early morning hours on October 27, after being hit by a vehicle while crossing a poorly lit highway near workers’ pickets.

“To me this is like the Hunger Games,” Marcia continued, “where everything is about the rich, the rich, the rich. But the districts in the Hunger Games are working class, and they all got together, and they put an end to it. And that’s what this is about.”

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

© World Socialist Web Site