

Deere workers rank-and-file statement: What's next in our strike

Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee
3 November 2021

The following statement was released by the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee on Wednesday afternoon, following the Deere workers defeat of a second UAW-backed contract on Tuesday. 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.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Yesterday, we voted down the second contract brought back by the UAW. Despite all their efforts to convince us that their deal was the best we could get, and to rush us into accepting it without showing the full contract, we held firm. This is because we are fighting not just for ourselves, but for our families, for all workers and for future generations.

The eyes of the world are now on us, and we are in a strong position to fight and win our demands. Deere has struggled to hire and fill orders, and it needs our labor power more than ever. And if we wage a determined struggle, we have the support of workers throughout the US and around the world.

Now is the time for us to fight to win!

However, the UAW throughout this entire process has proceeded from the opposite standpoint. They act as if the company is God, they're its priests, and we only deserve what it is willing to bestow. To win our fight, however, we must act now to form our own organizations, rank-and-file committees, to carry out a real struggle.

The statement from "Solidarity House" last night shows the UAW is doubling down on its strategy and is plotting its next move together with the company. In just three sentences announcing our rejection of their deal, the UAW public relations team wrote, "By a vote of 45% yes to 55% no, UAW John Deere members voted down the agreement this evening. The strike against John Deere and Company will continue as we discuss next steps with the company. Pickets will continue and any updates will be provided through the local union."

Excuse us, Messieurs Curry and Browning, discuss next steps with the company? Clearly it never occurred to you to discuss next steps with *us workers*, whom you take dues from and claim to represent.

But from the beginning, the UAW bureaucrats haven't listened to what we want. They pulled the mic on our brother in Waterloo who told them what he thought of their sellout yesterday, and they had the gall to tell our brothers and sisters at Harvester that they didn't want to hear any "nasty comments" about the contract.

The UAW says that "any updates will be provided." Clearly, they plan to continue what they've been doing all year: keep workers in the dark on what they're actually discussing with the company, while working out plans to try to get another deal through, as quickly as possible, which doesn't meet our demands.

Every Deere worker should study what happened to our brothers and sisters at Volvo Trucks earlier this year, which shows one type of betrayal the union bureaucracy could be preparing.

The UAW—with Ray Curry in the lead—brought back three concessions contracts that workers voted down, the first two times by over 90 percent. After the third contract was rejected by 60 percent, the UAW forced workers to re-vote on the exact same agreement less than a week later, telling them the company would unilaterally implement it no matter which way they voted. Even still, many Volvo workers defied this blackmail, and the UAW claimed the contract passed by just 17 votes, refusing to respond to calls for a recount.

We won an important battle yesterday. But to win the war, we must press our offensive. We can't allow Deere and the UAW any time to regroup and attempt to force through the same deal, or something largely similar with one or two cosmetic "sweeteners" thrown in.

The Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee demands the following:

1. Strike pay must be raised to workers' full income. It is criminal for the UAW to starve us on just \$275 a week

when they have hundreds of millions in the bank from our dues. The low level of strike pay is designed to weaken our resolve, and many more workers would have voted to reject the contract yesterday if they were being provided the resources necessary to hold out.

2. The secrecy surrounding the UAW's talks with the company must end. All talks between the company and union officials must be opened up to representatives from each plant elected by the rank-and-file. Moreover, any new contract proposal must be provided in full with a week for workers to study and discuss it.

3. Reinforcements must be mobilized in the auto and heavy equipment industries. Our brothers and sisters at Caterpillar, at CNH, at Volvo and Mack, and in the auto and auto parts industries face the same conditions. Workers at these companies are following our struggle closely, including at Dana, the parts company where the UAW just pushed through a sellout agreement, and at Deere operations globally, including in Germany.

We must appeal to workers at all of these companies and those who work at Deere's suppliers: Our fight is your fight! Prepare solidarity actions to strengthen all of our struggles.

4. No end to the strike until there is a contract that meets workers' basic demands. The Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee puts forth the following minimum demands for any agreement:

- **Full health care benefits for retirees:** This is a red line: Without health coverage in retirement, we face the threat of poverty in our old age after giving decades of our lives to the company, with our pensions and retirement income completely eaten up by skyrocketing health care costs and inflation.

- **Raises large enough to make up for years of cuts and freezes:** A \$10 wage increase up front, 5 percent per year after that, as well as COLA to protect against inflation. If Deere has the money for a 160 percent raise for its CEO and over a billion a year in dividends for its investors, then they have the money to provide us much higher wages.

- **Only 30 days' probation for new hires:** The current seven-month probation period is virtual indentured servitude, designed to intimidate new hires. Full rights and health insurance should be instated after just 30 days.

- **Pensions available for all workers:** The UAW claimed the company retreated from its demand to end pensions for new hires and create a new tier, but the devil is in the details,

which are never in the UAW's "highlights." Pensions and a secure retirement must be made available to all workers, including the next generation.

- **An end to relentless speed-up and mandatory overtime:** We must have adequate time to spend with our families, and a pace at work that doesn't leave our bodies broken.

- **A two-year contract:** A six-year contract, more than 15 percent of our working lives, benefits the company, which wants to lock us into terms with limits on labor costs for as long as possible.

After 2015 and the two contracts which have been rejected, we have to recognize that the UAW is not acting in our interests. We must have organizations that are accountable to us, that represent us, that speak for us.

We urge workers at every Deere plant and warehouse: Form rank-and-file strike committees of your own and link up with ours! Such committees will provide the critical means for workers to communicate and share information across the plants, make connections with workers at other companies and Deere workers in other countries, and develop a unified strategy, so that we can act with one voice.

To sit back and wait guarantees defeat. Deere and the UAW are "discussing their next steps." We, the rank-and-file workers of Deere, must organize, plan and take *our next steps*.

To those who voted yes on the last agreement, whether because of financial pressure or other reasons: we are still fighting alongside you and our bonds of solidarity remain unbroken. The company and the UAW want nothing more than to see us grow divided, which they would seek to take every advantage of.

Unity is more important than ever. Let us seize the opportunity and continue to press ahead for a victory that meets the needs of all workers!



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