

Detroit autoworkers back Deere strikers as UAW resumes talks with management to sell out struggle

Jerry White
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Autoworkers at the Stellantis (formerly Fiat Chrysler) Warren Truck Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit expressed strong support for the nearly month-long strike by 10,100 John Deere workers during a shift change Wednesday afternoon.

Supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* passed out hundreds of copies of a newsletter to workers featuring the article “John Deere strike at the crossroads,” as well as the statement “Defend Deere workers against company-UAW strikebreaking!” issued by the newly formed Deere Strike Rank-and-File Solidarity Committee.

The solidarity committee was founded on November 6 by rank-and-file auto and auto parts workers, educators, nurses and other workers to mobilize the broadest support in the working class for the Deere workers and break the isolation and sabotage of the strike by the United Auto Workers union.

Despite the deliberate efforts by the UAW to withhold information about the strike from other UAW members, the Warren Truck workers were aware of the struggle and readily took the newsletters, while shouting statements of solidarity to the Deere workers. “Stay strong,” “We’re with you” and “Keep up the fight” were the among the most typical comments. Several workers stopped to discuss the issues in the strike and the common fight workers at the Detroit automakers and Deere face against both the corporations and the UAW.

The response from Detroit autoworkers came the same day Bloomberg reported that the UAW and Deere were resuming formal negotiations on Thursday in the Quad Cities. The UAW has not issued any statements on the resumption of talks or what the content of such

meetings would be.

After Deere workers defeated a second UAW-backed contract on November 2, top executives from the farm and construction machinery manufacturer said that was their “last, best and final” offer. They insisted there “was nothing left on the table.” While declaring that they prefer to work out an agreement with the UAW to get workers back to work, top executives made it clear they were having ongoing discussions about unilaterally imposing the deal and firing any workers who did not cross the picket lines and return to work. When asked by reporters if the company was contemplating such an action, Marc Howze, Deere’s chief administrative officer, said “all options are on the table.”

In the face of these threats, the UAW has opposed any mobilization of the union’s 400,000 members. The UAW “talks” with management are not aimed at winning any gains from management but working out the best way to wear down the resistance of strikers so the UAW can push through the same or a slightly modified deal, which will still not meet workers’ demands.

The UAW knows if Deere workers win substantial pay increases, the restoration of fully paid pension and retiree health benefits and other concessions granted by the union over decades, it would lead to a flood of demands by autoworkers across the country to restore everything that has been taken from them. But joint action between Deere workers and autoworkers is exactly what is needed to overturn decades of concessions and win raises to protect living standards against raging inflation, which is now hitting 6.2 percent, the highest level in three decades.

“The union is stabbing the Deere workers in the back, but the workers are with the workers,” a veteran Chrysler worker said. “Everybody knows the union is in bed with the companies.” When a WSWs reporter pointed out that the Deere workers were revolting against the union and the company too, he replied, “You have to. That’s the only way you can make change.”

Many workers were angered to learn that the UAW was only paying Deere workers \$275 a week strike benefits, forcing many to go to local food pantries to feed their families. “They should be getting at least \$500 a week, with all the money [the UAW] is getting from us.”

A temporary part-time (TPT) worker who stopped to speak to the WSWs was impressed that Deere workers were fighting to ensure that the next generation of workers had full pensions and retiree health care benefits. “We don’t get a pension,” she said. “That is one reason I got into the auto industry. It’s not fair for the future generation. I want to thank the Deere workers for fighting for pensions and health benefits. If the older generation didn’t fight for our rights, we wouldn’t have anything. The companies don’t care about us.”

She said TPTs had not been given raises they were promised when they reached the anniversary of their hiring date. “The UAW lied to us twice. Then they said the information about our raises had been misquoted in the ‘highlights’ they gave us when we voted on the 2019 contract.”

At least 12 workers at the Warren Truck plant have died from COVID-19. In March 2020, workers at the paint shop carried out a wildcat strike in defiance of the UAW, following a similar action a few days earlier by their brothers and sisters at the Windsor, Ontario, Chrysler plant. This wildcat strike wave, which spread to other plants in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana, forced the two-month-long shutdown of the North American auto industry, which likely saved thousands of lives.

The WSWs also spoke with a Faurecia auto parts worker at the Saline, Michigan, plant outside Detroit who took part in the founding meeting of the Deere Strike Rank-and-File Solidarity Committee.

“The John Deere workers are taking a stand, and we have to get behind them and break through this. The union is trying to starve them on \$275 a week [while]

they are sitting on a strike fund of \$800 million. This is union dues. You can’t do anything with \$275. That isn’t covering your car note, food or anything.”

“We have been laid off,” the worker said, noting that his factory, which manufactures door panels, dashboards and other interior components for Ford, has been seriously impacted by the shortage of microchips and other parts hitting the auto industry. “By them working us a week, laying us off a week and working us a week, our unemployment benefits are not working right. “The one little check we got for being laid off one week was garnished for union dues. They got their money. Now I’m going to have another week without pay. We all need to be on strike.

“The union isn’t fighting for us at all. We are funding them, but they work for the company and not the workers,” he stated. “Everything we said at the founding meeting of the Deere Strike Rank-and-File Committee last week was right. We have to get behind their strike and take a stand for all of us.”



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