

John Deere workers in Orléans, France support strike by their American coworkers

Our reporters

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Yesterday, reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* travelled to the John Deere tractor parts factory in Orléans, south of Paris, which employs some 800 workers. They discussed the ongoing month-long strike by more than 10,000 John Deere workers in the United States, who are opposing the efforts of the company and United Auto Workers union to impose a concessions-laden contract.

The Orléans Deere workers expressed their support and solidarity for their striking co-workers internationally and denounced the efforts of the company to pit workers against one another across national boundaries.

“They should continue to fight for their rights,” said Weigel, who has three years’ experience at Orléans. “Whether it is in the United States or in France, it is always the big companies that profit off of the workers, and then whine about having to raise wages by 1-2 percent.

“We should unite together against the multinational in order to not be their prey. The workers in different countries have to be able to help each other.”

Matthieu, who has eight years’ experience at the Orléans plant, said, “We’re in solidarity with the American workers, especially since we hear that they don’t get to go on strike very often. They negotiate for a period of several years. And we heard that the boss just got a 160 percent pay increase.”

“We have to have international solidarity,” he explained. “Here there are certain production lines that, every time we go on strike, the company threatens us that these jobs may be taken away elsewhere. It’s a constant blackmail against our jobs. They threaten us.”

He described the conditions for the workers in France. “Prices for everything are rising,” he said. “They’re announcing another year of exceptional

profits for John Deere. Each time there is an annual bargaining meeting in April they announce profits, and they’re always considerable. Then they announce a 1 percent pay increase. There is high inflation but they tell us it is only 1.2 percent. Then they don’t understand why we would want to strike.

“They announce profits, the shareholders take everything, and they give us crumbs.”

In April this year, the Orléans plant was shut down for three days by Deere workers who were demanding increased bonuses and pay increases. “We wanted the bonus to not be a percentage of wages [which would give higher bonuses to management] but that the same sum would be paid to everyone.”

“The trade unions did not pay strike pay during the strike and when we struck for three days they asked the management only that the deduction from our salary be spread over three months,” he noted. Nor, in the case of the strike in the US, did the union seek to keep workers up to date about the struggle. “The trade unions did not come to see us saying there is a strike in the US,” he said. “We found out about it because it was in the news.”

“There is a growing anger,” Matthieu said. “The previous time there was a strike, there were only about 30 people who participated. This time there were over 200.”

Mélanie is a temporary worker at John Deere. A large portion of the Orléans plant workforce is made up of such temporary workers. They are hired via subcontractor agencies on short 18-month contracts, which they are unable to renew.

“What you describe about the trade unions in the United States, I have the impression that it is the same everywhere,” she said, referring to the corruption scandal that exposed millions of dollars in kickbacks to

the UAW leaders by the giant automakers. “Here the unions organise little strikes, toward the employer they adopt a strong enough tone, but really there is nothing much more than that. They are even supposed to give a debrief meeting with us every month but they don’t do it. They could take all our questions to try to address problems, but it doesn’t happen.”

“Concretely I would say to the US workers to not give up. Everything comes to those who demand it. They shouldn’t give up because they are 10,000 fighting it.”

Benjamin, a temporary worker with three months at the plant, told our reporters: “We are following this closely. There is support for the strike here that is sure. If they can make things change, they need to improve their working conditions.”



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