

Deere strikers and autoworkers voice support for joint fight, while UAW resumes secret talks with company

George Gallanis
11 November 2021

As 10,000 agricultural and construction John Deere workers enter their second month on strike, there is growing support for the struggle by workers in different industries and countries, who see in the strike a long-due uprising against decades of corporate attacks.

At the same time, the United Auto Workers union is intensifying its efforts to sabotage the strike and secure the company's terms. On Tuesday, UAW International spokesman Brian Rothenberg told the *Telegraph Herald* that the union officials were in active talks with Deere, while declining to comment on any details of the discussions. "Out of respect to our strikers and their families who are on the picket line, we are not going to bargain in the press," he said.

A more accurate statement by Rothenberg would have been: "Out of contempt for those whom we call 'members,' we are going to continue to tell them absolutely nothing about our discussions with the company, because the last thing we want is for them to know ahead of time that we're preparing another sellout contract."

Throughout the year, the talks between the UAW and Deere have not been "negotiations" between opposing parties. The UAW has signed off on and promoted two contracts pushed by the company that have not met the demands of workers to restore the substantial concessions in wages, benefits and working conditions previously enforced by the union bureaucracy over a number of contracts.

Voicing his anger over the UAW's conduct of the strike and its collusion with the company, a Deere worker in Cedar Falls, Iowa, told the WSWs, "The UAW's greed knows no bounds. We pay dues all year long, but then they get 'their cut' in 'special union

dues' out of our CIPP checks and other bonuses [CIPP refers to the productivity "incentive" pay designed to increase speedup]. They should not get 'special union dues' because they didn't work for our CIPP and other bonuses. Just another way the UAW steals my hard-earned money."

The UAW is above all fearful that the growing rebellion by Deere workers may spread and become uncontrollable, since hundreds of thousands of autoworkers have similarly seen their wages and benefits sharply decline under the UAW's watch.

The John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee has spearheaded the fight to broaden the strike and prevent another attempted betrayal by the well-compensated union executives at "Solidarity House." The rank-and-file committee has called for workers to receive full income to hold out against the company—instead of being starved on just \$275 a week from the UAW's \$790 million strike fund—and has appealed to autoworkers and Deere workers internationally to mobilize in support of their struggle.

Deere, for its part, has taken a hard line after workers voted down its second tentative agreement with the UAW on November 2, stating the deal was its "last, best and final" offer. The company has combined threats of hiring permanent strikebreakers with propaganda attempting to resell the contract workers voted down, which failed to meet their demands for retiree health benefits and major improvements in wages.

Deere Chief Technology Officer Jahmy Hindman told Fox News Thursday the "best solution is to get the UAW-represented folks – who do this job better than anybody – back in our factories and doing the work."

“That said,” he continued, “we’re exploring all options to attract the labor that we need in order to meet our other directive which is making sure that we don’t disappoint customers with planting season, in particular, right around the corner.”

As the harvest season wanes, the strike has delayed shipments of replacement parts farmers need to keep to maintain and fix their Deere equipment. Deere’s management has resorted to ratcheting up its strikebreaking through its “customer service continuity plan,” which uses supervisors, engineers and other salaried workers in place of striking Deere workers at facilities.

Deere is also seeking to increase production outside of the United States, underscoring the international character of Deere—which has 100 facilities in 30 countries—and therefore the need for an international strategy to fight it.

While the UAW and Deere conspire against workers, workers in different countries are coming to their defense. Deere workers from France and autoworkers in Detroit spoke to the WSWS this week and expressed their solidarity and encouragement for the striking workers. Moreover, on November 6, workers from multiple industries, including Deere, Volvo and Mack Trucks, Deere suppliers Dana and Faurecia, Detroit autoworkers, nurses and educators established the Deere Strike Rank-and-File Solidarity Committee to mobilize the working class in the US and internationally to support the struggle.

Speaking on the Deere strike, a Ford Chicago Assembly Plant worker told the WSWS Thursday, “I never hear anything on the news about the strike and very little about it on Google. Mostly I get news about it from the WSWS. It’s a tough time for working people everywhere, especially people who are on strike. Ford is cutting jobs in Chicago. The union and the company just give jobs to whoever they want to, there’s no more ‘I got your back,’ at least in Chicago.

Addressing himself to the Deere strikers, he added, “I hope that they get everything they deserve and more. My wish is that more people would understand why this is happening and help.”

Responding to the statements of support from Detroit autoworkers, a worker at one of Deere’s parts depots said, “Thank you. These people rock.”

“People have to stand up,” he continued. “A huge

message needs to get out to all the workers at Deere. People need to understand that Deere and UAW are coming for everything they have.”

A Deere worker in Ottumwa, Iowa, made a powerful appeal for international unity among workers around their common interests, telling the WSWS, “I would ask that this strike be known worldwide, to let workers know they are not alone against corporate Deere.

“To those that have supported our efforts we sincerely thank each and every one of you,” he continued. “Your kindness is overwhelming. To those just learning what we are doing, I hope we can raise pay and benefits for all of you. Let’s show Deere that the 2-3 percent of the operational expense pie that represents workers everywhere means workers deserve another piece of pie.

“We make sure farmers, construction, and equipment operators everywhere have the very best quality machines we are able to give them. Our jobs should again regain the recognition of being sought after also. Our products are not ‘just another product,’ so our jobs shouldn’t be just another job either.”

Addressing himself to Deere workers worldwide, he said, “We all follow similar work processes and managerial directions. Let us use what we have in common to build off of. Let’s open up communication between us. Your struggles should be our struggles. When we help any of our brothers or sisters anywhere, we are helping all of them become stronger. We have the abilities to build machines that feed the world.”

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