

Deere workers denounce UAW sellout deal and call for continued strike action

Marcus Day

17 November 2021

Deere workers: Join the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee to carry forward the fight! Email deerewrfc@gmail.com, or by text at (484) 514-9797 to get involved.

Follow live updates on Wednesday's vote at Deere

On Tuesday, striking Deere workers voiced their opposition to the company's so-called "last, best and final offer," which the United Auto Workers union is forcing workers to vote on today.

In its latest show of contempt for the will of its members, the UAW's contract proposal is almost entirely unchanged from the second union-backed deal workers voted to reject on November 2.

The only "modest modifications," as the UAW described them, are to a regressive pay-for-performance incentive system, CIPP, which is widely hated by workers. While the changes to CIPP could entail a relative pay bump for a portion of Deere's workforce, the added income would be entirely dependent on even more grueling production goals and sweatshop conditions.

In a statement that has been widely circulated among workers in recent days, the John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee called for a "no" vote and denounced the UAW's move as a sellout. The rank-and-file committee also urged workers to form teams to oversee the balloting in order to prevent any vote rigging by the UAW.

"This 'new' offer is pathetic!" a veteran worker at one of the company's plants in Waterloo, Iowa told the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*. "All they did was put lipstick on a pig by offering to give us more of our own money each week.

"CIPP is a joke! We call it 'Cut In Personal Pay.' No one wants it, yet the International and Local think it's a good thing. All it does is pit union members against each other. Deere just needs to get rid of CIPP and just give us a decent raise instead of nickel and diming us every year."

The worker said that Deere is acting as though the ratification of the contract is a done deal. "Salary folks have come through some gates and said they'd see us at work Thursday. They're taking down barricades and expecting us back at work on Thursday, but we have not even voted yet."

He said workers are concerned that the UAW may again try to rig the vote, as they suspect it did in 2015, when it claimed its agreement with Deere passed by just 180 votes. "My union brothers and sisters already suspect that 'fix is in' and the International has teamed up with the company before our vote tomorrow."

However, he said that many workers who had previously voted in favor of the second tentative agreement were now opposed to the deal because of Deere's arrogant propaganda campaign in recent weeks. "I can tell you it shouldn't pass because those 'yes' votes last time have become 'no' votes this time. Why? Well, there is A LOT of

animosity towards Becky Guinn, Waterloo's manager, who had sent out over 150 emails to politicians, businesses, and media outlets telling them they should not support us because the second offer was 'so generous' and we were just being greedy. THAT re-energized and re-unified us."

Expressing widely held sentiments, he added, "We are never going to be in this position again! This is our time to fight!"

While Waterloo has been the center of opposition to the company's and UAW's deals, workers at other Deere plants also voiced their disgust with the contract and the attempts to intimidate them into accepting it. "It's an improvement, but not what we deserve," a worker at Harvester Works in East Moline, Illinois, told the WSWS. "Deere doesn't give a damn about us." A worker at the parts distribution center in Milan, Illinois, said, "I'm voting no, it's the same contract with numbers moved around. The company manipulates the CIPP plan to where the workers don't make money."

In a powerful statement, a Deere worker in Des Moines and member of the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee said, "Tomorrow we will find out if we were strong enough to resist scare tactics unleashed against us by John Deere while our union stood by watching and rooting for the company, hoping to break us and make us submit to its demands."

Addressing himself to his fellow workers, he continued: "Do not forget years and years of struggle that working men and women faced and overcame so we can enjoy the fruits of their victories. Unlike us, they did not have the favorable conditions we have today, yet they prevailed and delivered the working class benefits we enjoy today. Our predecessors had to fight for every little thing: eight-hour workdays, child labor laws, vacations, breaks, overtime pay and the rights to organize, to collectively bargain, to have health care and retirement. Nobody gave them these things out of the goodness of their heart. They stood up to corporations, politicians and their strikebreakers, they resisted physical violence so they, their families, and us today can have all of these things.

"So what are we afraid of today? Ask yourself that question. Are we going to stand up for ourselves, our families, and generations to come? Or are we going to concede to the company in its demands without making a real stand? Unity is what makes our strength, and the company knows that. This fear of it is why the company is trying to divide us.

"I urge you to see through these scare tactics, hold the line, and vote NO tomorrow for the better future of all working class people in the USA and the world whose support we have."

UAW and Deere ratchet up pressure campaign

The workers' determination to continue the fight is all the more significant given the immense pressure being brought to bear on them by Deere, the UAW and the corporate-controlled media.

With farm equipment parts being delayed weeks due to the strike, orders for new equipment continuing to pile up, and its fourth-quarter earnings report due next week, Deere has grown increasingly desperate to find some means of getting workers back into the plants. It has combined lies about the "ground-breaking" character of the agreement with threats that it will hire replacement workers and ramp up production overseas should the strike continue.

The UAW has gone along with and supplemented these strikebreaking efforts. The union has starved workers on the picket lines on just \$275 a week, despite maintaining a nearly \$800 million strike fund, and has kept workers entirely in the dark on its talks with the company. What little local officials have said has parroted the corporate lies that Deere must remain "competitive" and thus cannot afford workers' demands for major wage increases, the restoration of retiree health benefits, and an end to CIPP and mandatory overtime.

In the votes tomorrow, the UAW is doing everything it can to isolate workers. At Waterloo—where workers have angrily denounced union officials at the last two ratification meetings—it has divided workers into 12 one-hour voting blocks. However, on Facebook workers at Waterloo have discussed arriving to the vote en masse and staying to ensure the ballot count is not manipulated by union officials.

Broad sections of workers in manufacturing, food production, film and television, health care, public education and elsewhere have been seeking to go on the offensive in recent months, with more than 40 strikes in the US since October 1. The reemergence of class struggle has been fueled by growing outrage among workers over the horrific toll of the pandemic and its disastrous handling by the ruling class. While workers have been forced to confront deadly working conditions on miserably inadequate wages, corporations such as Deere have reaped record profits, and the billionaires have seen their fortunes surge by \$2 trillion.

The anxiety in ruling circles over the further destabilization of social equilibrium has been expressed in the pages of the corporate press. On Tuesday, the *Washington Post*, owned by Jeff Bezos (whose own wealth has grown nearly \$90 billion since March last year), wrote, "The historic strikes at Deere, best known for its John Deere-branded machinery, are a stark example of the pandemic's impact on the economy. The gyrations that coronavirus caused in global commerce have upended not only supply and demand but workers' attitudes, causing many to question for the first time in decades what they're willing to tolerate."

Confronting a rising tide of working class anger, the capitalist elite has thus far largely sought to rely on the trade union bureaucracies for support. The pro-corporate "unions," having facilitated a decades-long assault on workers' jobs, wages and benefits, have been attempting to hold back workers from striking wherever possible, most recently announcing "last-minute" tentative agreements at Kaiser Permanente and in the film and TV industry.

Where the unions have been unable to prevent struggles, such as at Volvo Trucks, Deere, Warrior Met Coal, Nabisco and Frito-Lay, they have responded by seeking to starve strikers and demoralize them into submission.

However, despite attempts by the company and the media to slander

workers at Deere as "greedy," the strike continues to receive widespread and growing support. A *Des Moines Register*/Mediacom poll released Sunday showed that a majority of Iowa's residents support the strike, with sentiment in favor cutting across self-reported political affiliations. Significantly, support was particularly strong among young people under 35, with 72 percent saying they sided with the strikers.

Workers are increasingly organizing outside the company-controlled unions to share information and coordinate their struggles. The Deere Strike Rank-and-File Solidarity Committee—formed by workers at Deere, in the auto and parts industries, public education, health care, and film industries—issued a statement Monday night urging the working class to rally in support of the strike and defend it against the attempted sabotage of the UAW.

A film and TV worker from California in the committee drew comparisons to their own struggle against the IATSE union's betrayal. On Monday, IATSE declared that its sellout contract with the studios and Hollywood producers had been ratified, despite the fact that a majority of workers voted against it, based on the union's undemocratic "Electoral College"-type voting system.

"We are following what is happening at Deere and Kaiser," she said. "It is chilling to notice just how the leaders of all the unions spread misinformation, manipulate and try to keep the rank and file from talking to one another. It's eye-opening. But the terrible conditions and the betrayal of the leaderships are forcing workers to fight. We are realizing that the leaders are hostile to our interests."

"As we have become very deeply embroiled in this contract conflict, we've looked around and seen it's happening to all different workers, that you're not alone anymore," she continued. "It makes me think of the amount of power that we have. When we come together, nothing can stop this kind of solidarity, so we have to begin building a bridge between us. We can make these really important changes, I really do believe that."



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