

Deere workers denounce UAW “dirty tricks” operation to pass contract: “They’re criminal scumbags”

Marcus Day

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As 10,000 John Deere workers have begun to return to plants and warehouses in recent days following the shutdown of their five-week-long strike, anger has remained high at the United Auto Workers union, which used threats and intimidation in order to secure passage of its contract with the company.

The UAW declared that Deere’s “last, best and final offer” was ratified by 61 percent last Wednesday, marking the illegitimate outcome of an undemocratic process overseen by the union, which effectively forced workers to revote on a contract they had already rejected two weeks earlier.

The UAW’s betrayal of the strike blocked Deere workers, for now, from pressing ahead at a particularly vulnerable point for the company. Confirming this, the financial news outlet Bloomberg wrote last week: “The strike had thrown several of Deere’s businesses into turmoil. Software engineers and computer programmers left their desks to assemble sprayers and combines in manufacturing plants instead. Serious delays in replacement parts threatened farmers, who rely on functional machines and speedy repairs at the peak of harvest. Used farm equipment prices were hitting record highs amid shortages.

“The strike was squeezing the company,” the article continued. “Last week it sent an email to gauge the interest of even more salaried information technology workers to volunteer in factories if the situation continued.”

Several workers at the company’s plants in Waterloo, Iowa, spoke to the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* about the UAW’s efforts to coerce them into voting “yes.” Waterloo has the largest concentration of Deere’s workers and was the center of

opposition to each of the UAW-company deals, with workers at Local 838 voting to reject the final offer as well as all the earlier proposed agreements.

A veteran worker told the WSWs upon returning last week, “Work was VERY quiet. Not many folks are happy about being sold out and the dirty tactics by the union, both International and local.”

A skilled tradesman described the UAW’s efforts to intimidate workers into voting “yes” last Wednesday. “I can tell you that the day that I voted I was approached by several UAW stewards and such who did everything that they could to change my vote. Even trying to show me that one could make over \$100,000 a year on this new contract once they retire.

“At one time I had five guys surrounding me to try to intimidate me into changing my vote,” he said. “Whenever I would give them a different viewpoint, they would call me a conspiracy theorist and say I was just being negative. By the end of this the last person stated just go vote no, you’re a loser and your vote won’t matter anyways. Like they knew it was a yes vote already.”

Such blatant voter intimidation efforts were not limited to Waterloo. At Local 281 in Davenport, the UAW elections chair responsible for overseeing the vote, Phil Gonterman, had stated on Facebook that he planned to use his position as an inspector to retaliate against those who opposed the contract, saying he would “f**k their lights out for every quality issue.” Another local official, 281 Vice President Brian Ripple, suggested on Facebook that Deere should outsource Waterloo’s work to Mexico.

The skilled trades worker said that although there was a mood of frustration and disappointment among those

who had rejected the deal, workers who voted “yes” indicated they had done so not because they supported the contract, but because they felt as though they had no other choice: “Even some of the yes voters felt like they were forced to vote yes because they were convinced that this was the best that we could have gotten.”

He added that workers were galled upon returning to find that their toolboxes had been broken into during the strike, with equipment they had purchased, and other personal items stolen. “The company was stealing our tools and cutting our locks on our personal belongings while we were out on strike.”

A third worker at Waterloo said, “Some areas were laid off already on Friday from lack of parts, go figure!”

Referring to the changes to the CIPP pay-for-performance system, which the company added to its “last, best and final offer” after workers rejected its second tentative agreement with the UAW, he said, “That whole BS new CIPP plan won’t begin until January 31st, 2022! My guess is they will butcher the areas that have a high proficiency to pay the plans on the lower end.” As the WSWS has written, CIPP is a regressive scheme, widely hated by workers, which uses bumps in pay as a goad to spur on speedup and higher output.

“Some of the new language won’t be finalized until proofreading of the letters again,” he continued. “Long story short even though you might have a new language in some of the contract book, it will be the same old same old. My guess is tomorrow they will start cracking the whip, push push push!”

Workers at other Deere facilities besides those in Waterloo also voiced their disgust with the UAW. “Fourth quarter earnings come out soon and the union pushed it through before that happened,” a worker in Des Moines said. “I’m pretty sure they all rejoiced when it passed.”

“They’re criminal scumbags. There’s no solidarity from our union officials at our local—they are all for their little clique and if you aren’t in it, then too bad.”

Workers at the parts distribution center (PDC) in Milan, Illinois said that so many workers stayed home that Deere had canceled shifts over the weekend.

“Not many people have shown up at all,” one worker said. “So few have shown up that they canceled this

weekend’s shifts.”

Another worker at PDC voiced her concern over the coming efforts to ramp up overtime. “I feel that we will be working overtime for a very long time. They said next Friday and Saturday will be voluntary, and after that it will be Mandatory Saturdays. They are behind on everything besides Flash [emergency orders] which have to go out every day.”

The company will undoubtedly seek to utilize every means at its disposal to speed up and compensate for lost production during the strike, which significantly disrupted its operations. Deere CEO John May said in a statement following Wednesday’s vote that management had “faith” that workers “will find new and better ways to improve our competitiveness” now that the contract is passed—in other words, produce even more wealth for Deere’s billionaire investors and Wall Street shareholders.

The coming struggles over speedup, overtime, and working conditions—and inevitably many other areas of the contract’s “fine print” left out of the UAW’s highlights—makes it all the more important that workers join and build the John Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Throughout the struggle, the committee gave voice to workers’ demands to restore past concessions and win major wage increases, exposed the UAW and company’s lies and threats, and worked to mobilize support among workers in the US and internationally.

Deere workers: Join the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee to carry forward the fight! Email deerewrfc@gmail.com, or text (484) 514-9797 to find out more about getting involved.



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