

UAW extends CNH contract “hour by hour,” provoking growing discontent among workers

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Work at CNH? We want to hear from you: Tell us about the conditions at your workplace, and what workers are fighting for. Comments will be published anonymously.

Shortly after the previous six-year contract expired for approximately 1,000 CNH Industrial workers in Wisconsin and Iowa, the United Auto Workers union announced that it would be extending the prior agreement.

At 2:01 a.m. early Sunday morning, two hours after the contract expiration, UAW Local 180 in Racine, Wisconsin, posted a statement from the union’s International headquarters on its Facebook page announcing the extension. An official for Local 180 added, “We are extending the contract hour by hour. We are close but we’re not there yet. There will be more information in the very near future. Report to work on Monday as normal until you hear different from the leadership.”

The UAW’s contract extension comes in defiance of overwhelming strike authorization votes earlier this month by workers in Racine (with 98.4 percent voting in favor of a walkout) and Burlington, Iowa (97.4 percent). Like their brothers and sisters at John Deere and Volvo Trucks last year, the agricultural and construction equipment workers at CNH are seeking to seize the moment and reverse decades of declining wages, benefits and working conditions.

The extension has already provoked discontent among workers. “Earlier this week the members were expressing their opinion about a possible extension, and it wasn’t good,” a worker in Burlington told the WSWWS.

Previous experience shows that the UAW, in its closed-doors discussions with management, is rapidly moving to finalize a sellout agreement which will fail

to meet any of the basic needs of CNH workers.

At John Deere last year, the UAW also waited until after a midnight contract expiration before announcing an extension of the previous agreement on October 1. Less than 24 hours later, the UAW announced a tentative agreement with the company, with President Ray Curry claiming it included “substantial gains for members.”

In fact, the agreement failed utterly to meet workers’ demands for major improvements to wages and benefits. Workers rejected the proposal with contempt, voting it down by a massive 90 percent margin and beginning their first strike in 35 years a few days later.

At CNH, workers should have no doubt that the same team of company stooges—including UAW President Ray Curry, UAW Vice President Chuck Browning, and Region 4 Director Ron McInroy—are once again preparing to push through the demands of the company.

Workers should take the initiative now, and not adopt a “wait and see” approach to the UAW’s inevitable pro-corporate machinations. Rank-and-file committees independent of the UAW should be initiated at both Burlington and Racine, in order to form lines of communications between the two plants and to formulate demands based on what workers really need.

The company, a global operation with factories on five continents, has plenty of money to provide workers a decent standard of living. Like Deere and other major agribusiness firms like ADM, CNH is expecting to profit handsomely from the skyrocketing rise in commodity prices driven by the US-NATO proxy war with Russia in Ukraine. In a recent presentation to investors, the company forecast sales of \$22 billion by 2024, up from \$17.8 billion last year.

Huge sums are squandered on top executives and

shareholders. In 2021, CNH provided CEO Scott Wine with total compensation of \$21.8 million, 313 times the average employee's pay, according to the company's own calculations. CNH has expended tens of millions more in share-based compensation for other executives, as well as \$200 million in dividends last year.

Also in 2021, the company spent \$2.1 billion to acquire Raven, a precision agricultural technology firm. Just last week, CNH sold off the engineered films division of the acquired company for \$350 million.

In March, the company announced that the board had approved a share buyback program of up to 100 million euros, which will largely benefit institutional and super-wealthy investors by driving up CNH's stock price.

The worker in Burlington described the increasingly grueling work schedules workers have faced, as well as the long-term decline in wages. "We've done more Sundays than we've ever done in past years. When I first started, they weren't even on the list. This past six years, there's been a lot of Sundays.

"In 2016, they took all the COLA out [cost-of-living adjustment raises which offset inflation]. And before that happened, when we were on the old contract, it had taken a while to build that up. We got screwed.

"What we're making now isn't even close to what we should be making. Workers back in the 90s were making close to \$26 [an hour]!"

Workers are increasingly distrustful of the UAW, he said. "We don't trust the union up above. I don't trust them at all. When the last meeting we had to vote for our strike, our president and chairman didn't really tell us what they're asking for. They gave an overall dollar amount for the contract, but they didn't really explain that to us.

"I totally understand we're up against both the company and the union. We're just not taking it any more. I know in my heart, you're not pushing me to do nothing. And I know Racine feels the same way."

"This is about our future. This is big. When you sign an agreement, it has to be right. There's money to go around for everybody."

The overwhelming strike votes at CNH and workers' determination to win back earlier concessions is part of an overall development of the class struggle internationally. From the US to Sri Lanka, Peru to Turkey, and in many other countries, workers are launching strikes and demonstrations against an

increasingly impossible cost of living, along with wages that have stagnated or eroded for decades.

A central role in the struggle by Deere workers was the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee, organized by workers with the assistance of the *World Socialist Web Site*, that formulated demands and provided workers with timely information to help defeat UAW sellouts.

A central task of a rank-and-file committee at CNH will be to draw up a list of demands based on the common interests of all workers, such as an end to the tier system, an immediate 40 percent raise to make up for years of stagnation, the restoration of COLA and retiree health benefits, improvements to working hours, and more.

To fight for these and other demands, workers in Racine and Burlington should reach out to the thousands of CNH workers at non-union plants—in the US and in other countries—as well as workers at Deere, Caterpillar, Volvo, Mack, and the Big Three automakers, to prepare the groundwork for a new working class movement for higher wages, job security, and decent working conditions.



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