

As CNH strike concludes second week, workers voice growing frustration over UAW information blackout

Marcus Day
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Work at CNH? Share your thoughts on the strike and what workers should fight for. Comments will be published anonymously.

As the strike by roughly 1,200 CNH Industrial workers in Wisconsin and Iowa concludes its second week, there is growing frustration among workers over the information blackout by the United Auto Workers union on its talks with the company. The strike began on May 2, 36 hours after the expiration of the previous six-year contract between the UAW and CNH, a global agricultural and construction equipment maker which produces Case IH, New Holland and other brands.

Workers, inspired by the 2021 John Deere strike, are determined to win back previous concessions in wages, benefits and working conditions. A central concern is wages, given the skyrocketing inflation in food, gas and other basic necessities, and the bumper profits CNH has reaped over the past year.

Top UAW officials, however, have provided no concrete details on what they are demanding from the company, workers say.

“I am worried about the vagueness of what they’re demanding,” a CNH worker in Racine, Wisconsin, told the WWS. “[UAW Vice President] Chuck Browning said they were working to increase our standard of living, but it was not very aggressive-feeling. Workers are worried the next contract will be another slap in the face. We’re mostly in the dark.

“In today’s day and age, there’s no reason the negotiations can’t be live-streamed,” he said.

A worker at the Burlington, Iowa, CNH factory said about the contract talks, “I’m concerned about whatever it is they’re talking about behind the scenes. Why is it such a secret? That’s one of the biggest

things that has everyone on edge.”

At the same time it is keeping CNH workers in the dark, the UAW is effectively blacking out any news of the strike from its hundreds of thousands of members in the auto industry and at Deere, Caterpillar, and other heavy equipment manufacturers. The information embargo is being carried out in de facto coordination with the company and the national media, which has remained entirely silent on one of the largest strikes of industrial workers currently taking place in the US.

The ever-present fear in both corporate boardrooms and UAW offices is that any given struggle could ignite pent-up anger among millions of workers over decades of deteriorating living standards and working conditions.

While CNH workers have been told virtually nothing about the contract talks, management has been given a free hand to escalate its strikebreaking efforts.

The company has sought to maintain operations through the use of salaried personnel and outside scabs, while production has continued uninterrupted at its non-union factories—which comprise the majority of its facilities in the US—as well as a plant in Fargo, North Dakota, at which it has a contract with the International Association of Machinists.

Even more provocatively, the company terminated medical, dental and vision insurance for workers as of Saturday in a move aimed at intimidating the strikers. The UAW is covering workers’ medical insurance out of its \$800 million strike fund, but workers will be left on the hook for dental and vision expenses.

The company claimed in recent days that it had discussed the cutoff of health benefits with UAW officials even before the strike began. A company

spokesperson told industry publication *Equipment World*, “Before the strike started on May 2, representatives for CNH Industrial and the UAW spoke about how to handle health care coverage of striking employees during the strike. As a result of that discussion, both parties agreed that the provision of health care benefits would transition from being provided by CNH Industrial to being provided by the UAW.”

The UAW did not dispute the company’s account, according to *Equipment World*, which stated, “UAW leadership had no official comment on the health care coverage transition.”

Regardless of the accuracy of the company’s claim—which is self-serving and aimed at deflecting anger from its ruthless move against workers—it remains the case that the contract talks between CNH and the UAW have a conspiratorial character. Far from being out of the ordinary, such secrecy has become the norm in contracts “negotiated” by the UAW. From one company to the next, it has routinely kept its members in the dark on discussions with management, before springing contract “highlights” designed to conceal significant concessions handed over to the corporations.

But since the beginning of last year, the determination in the working class to secure major improvements in wages and benefits has increasingly taken the form of a rebellion against the pro-corporate trade union bureaucracy. Most recently, roughly 1,200 workers at Detroit Diesel voted by 79 percent to massively reject a UAW-negotiated tentative agreement at the engine maker. Over the course of 2021, workers also repeatedly voted down UAW-endorsed contracts, rejecting pro-company deals by overwhelming margins at Volvo Trucks (twice by 90 percent); at Dana Inc., an auto parts manufacturer; and at John Deere.

Faced with the indifference and even hostility of the UAW to their interests, a growing number of workers have begun to organize independently, initiating rank-and-file committees in order to break through the information blackouts and to formulate and fight for workers’ real needs.

At both CNH and Detroit Diesel, the demand should be raised: Workers have a right to know what is being negotiated with the companies! In its statement issued on May 5—Expand the CNH strike to fight for a \$10 raise and COLA!—the CNH Workers Rank-and-File

Committee called for an end to closed-door talks between the UAW and the company, writing:

The UAW information blackout must end. Union officials have been meeting with the company for weeks. What have they been demanding? Us workers are the only ones being kept in the dark. No more closed door negotiations! Rank-and-file workers should nominate representatives to oversee any future talks between management and the UAW.

“They’re just trying to play this game and keep us in low poverty,” the worker in Burlington continued. “But we got a good community around here, we got to survive. And this is not just for us, it’s global. All these other workers in other countries are going out and shutting down their plants too.”

To join the CNH Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email cnhrfc@gmail.com, or text (262) 676-2381. To talk to some at the WSWS about joining or forming a committee at another workplace, fill out the form below:



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