

In bid to shut down strike, UAW to bring CNH's "last, best and final offer" to a vote

Marcus Day
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Work at CNH? We want to hear from you: Fill out the form at the end to tell us what you think about the contract vote and what you're fighting for.

On Monday, the United Auto Workers union announced that it would be holding a vote on a "last, best and final offer" from construction and agricultural equipment maker CNH Industrial, in a bid to shut down the courageous eight-month-long strike by roughly 1,100 workers in Wisconsin and Iowa. In one of the longest walkouts by UAW members in decades, workers have been fighting to reverse a long-term decline in wages and benefits.

The secrecy with which the UAW bureaucracy is shrouding the contract, however, leaves little doubt that the proposal would entail painful new concessions.

In a curt, three-sentence press release announcing the vote, the UAW national headquarters wrote: "After nearly eight months on strike and continued bargaining, the CNHI has presented an upgraded last, best, and final offer. The UAW Bargaining Committee has decided to bring this offer to the members of Locals 180 and 807 for a vote. Details regarding locations of the ratification meetings, timing and voting will be communicated by the local leadership."

Workers at CNH in Burlington, Iowa, told the WSWS that a vote had been scheduled for Saturday, but said the UAW had not provided any details about what was in the proposal. Several workers said they did not think the UAW was planning to release information about the contract until the meeting immediately prior to the vote itself.

But workers have a right to know what's in the contract! CNH workers should demand that the UAW immediately release the full contract language, including all "letters of understanding," and provide at least a week to allow workers to carefully study and discuss the proposal. If the UAW bureaucracy refuses, then workers should reject the agreement on principle.

It is impossible for workers to make a truly informed decision about a contract which will determine the next several years of their working lives on the basis of a rushed review of "highlights." The only plausible explanation why the UAW executives would not be giving workers adequate time to understand what they're voting on is that they are hoping to

once again ram through the company's demands, after having isolated and starved workers on the picket lines for months.

Like the UAW, management is also thus far keeping silent about the proposal. The Associated Press reported that CNH did not respond to a request for comment about the contract. CNH has taken a ruthless approach against workers from the outset, cutting off workers' health insurance and bringing in strikebreakers in an effort to maintain production.

Management reportedly had presented a "last, best and final" offer previously in September, which the UAW bargaining team declined to bring to a vote, evidently concerned that it would be massively voted down by workers. CNH later stated that that deal expired in mid-October, and that subsequent offers would be less generous.

Last month, workers in Burlington and in Racine, Wisconsin, had told the WSWS that health care, wages and the divisive tier system remained major points of contention. "Health care's one of the big problems, because they're basically wanting to raise our premiums to where any raise we'd get would be null and void," one worker had said. "Their health care they're offering is not a very good plan; if I broke an arm I might as well declare bankruptcy."

Opposition to the company's arrogant demands for concessions remains high among workers. On Tuesday, a striking worker in Burlington told the WSWS, "If they have changed the health care to what we had before and [included] COLA then I would vote yes, but if they didn't give us any of that then I would vote no still."

Like workers at John Deere, Caterpillar and the Big Three automakers, workers at CNH have suffered a substantial erosion in their living standards over decades, with the UAW apparatus fully complicit in enforcing management's cost-cutting demands. In 2004-05, the UAW sold out a months-long strike-turned-lockout at CNH, imposing a tier system and permanently slashing pay and benefits for new hires, as it had earlier done at Deere and Caterpillar. Since then, workers have seen further concessions handed over to the company in contract after contract.

Lessons from the struggle at Deere: “The union heads and helpers will straight up lie to them”

The UAW bureaucracy has a well-documented record of keeping workers in the dark on its closed-door talks with the company and springing self-serving “highlights” on workers immediately before a contract vote, with the aim of strong-arming a ratification.

Workers at CNH should take warning from the experience at John Deere in 2015. That year, the UAW also did not release any details of its tentative agreement with Deere until the ratification meetings, and even then only provided workers selective “highlights,” and not the full contract. Workers were furious to learn that the agreement contained only a \$3 raise over six years, raised out-of-pocket health care costs, and maintained the hated tier system. The deal’s architect was then-UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell, who later pleaded guilty to accepting bribes from Fiat Chrysler management. Fiat Chrysler (now Stellantis, having merged with PSA Group in 2021) was owned largely by the billionaire Agnelli dynasty, which also is the dominant owner of CNH.

In 2021, with this bitter experience still fresh in their minds, Deere workers organized in the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee demanded that the UAW release the full contract language from its tentative agreement with the company. Facing overwhelming pressure, the UAW did so. Able to read the full terms of the deal, workers learned that the agreement fell far short of their demands for major improvements to wages and benefits. Workers then voted down the first UAW-endorsed contract by a stunning 90 percent, and rejected a second, similar proposal by 55 percent. Only on the UAW’s third attempt was it able to push through a virtually unchanged deal in a “re-vote,” on the basis of lies and intimidation.

Deere workers who spoke to the WSWS on Tuesday had words of warning for their brothers and sisters at CNH. “Watch out for the details, and what they don’t tell you,” a retired worker in Ottumwa, Iowa, said.

“I can tell them this: The union heads and helpers will straight up lie to them,” said a Deere worker in Waterloo. “They’ll tell them it is the best the company has to offer and it is the company’s final offer. All lies.”

Organize rank-and-file committees to expand and win the strike!

CNH workers are well aware that the company is massively profitable, benefiting from strong demand for its equipment and able to substantially raise prices. The company has reaped billions in profit since the start of the pandemic, funneling

wealth to large investors and top executives, including CEO Scott Wine, who received over \$21 million in compensation in 2021.

There is more than enough money to provide workers at CNH with substantial raises, COLA, fully paid-for health coverage, and more. But in order to overcome the resistance of both management and the corrupt UAW bureaucracy and win what workers need, the strike must be guided by a new strategy and led by workers themselves, organized in rank-and-file committees.

This perspective had been advocated for by Will Lehman, a second-tier worker at Mack Trucks and a candidate for UAW president in the union’s national elections. Lehman has repeatedly appealed to workers throughout the UAW to mobilize in support of workers at CNH, and for the strikers to be provided with their full incomes out of the UAW’s more than \$800 million strike fund.

Lehman told the WSWS, “I encourage workers at CNH to demand what is their right: they have a right to see the full contract and enough time to actually study and discuss it, in order to be fully informed and have a genuinely democratic vote. But the highly paid UAW bureaucrats don’t want to do this, because they want to maintain their comfortable positions, and are afraid of the CNH strike spreading and encouraging other workers to rebel.”

“Whatever the UAW bureaucrats may try to say, you can still win this fight. Workers at CNH have powerful allies, including the thousands of Caterpillar workers whose contract expires in February, and the tens of thousands of Big Three autoworkers also seeking to combat inflation and job cuts.

“You are part of an international working class which is becoming aware of how strong it is, and is looking to fight back. That’s why I say we need an international strategy and a network of rank-and-file committees, so that workers ourselves, not the union bureaucrats, can make the decisions and secure our needs.”



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