CNH workers: Vote NO on the contract! Form rank-and-file committees to expand and win the strike!

Marcus Day
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The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* urges striking CNH workers in Racine, Wisconsin, and Burlington, Iowa, to vote "no" on the company's so-called "last, best, and final offer" this weekend. The contract proposal would set a dangerous precedent of further concessions in wages, benefits and working conditions for workers throughout the heavy equipment and broader automotive industries.

Workers are being forced to go into Saturday's contract votes essentially blind. Despite the UAW International announcing on Monday, January 2, that it would be putting the proposal to a vote, the UAW bureaucracy has kept workers in the dark on the full terms of the contract in the week since then.

However, even the limited information which union officials have provided makes clear that the proposal is utterly inadequate to meet workers' needs.

Aware that workers are in no mood for concessions after having sacrificed for eight months on the picket lines, UAW 180 officials in Racine, Wisconsin, have called for a no vote. "It needs to get voted down," Local 180 President Yasin Mahdi told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, calling the contract a "waste of paper."

"It's still a deficient proposal and doesn't meet our members' demands," stated Local 180 bargaining committee chair Rich Glowacki.

Officials from Local 807 in Burlington, Iowa, for their part, sought to paint the contract in a positive light in interviews with the *Des Moines Register*. "We were able to make significant improvements to leave a little bit better tastes in our mouths," said Local 807 President Nick Guernsey.

But the few details Local 807 officials revealed in their comments to the *Register* show that workers would be as bad or worse off as they are now by the end of the contract. The four-year proposal would:

• **Raise wages by just 23 percent and include a lump-sum ratification bonus of $4,500**. A substantial portion of the bonus would be taxed away, and it would not even come close to making up for the wages lost throughout the strike.

• **Omit COLA (cost-of-living raises to keep up with rising prices)**. With inflation having averaged over eight percent in 2022, the wage increases in the contract would almost certainly entail a cut in real income and decline in workers' purchasing power by 2026.

• **Increase health care premiums by 12.5 percent, further eating up the wage increases.** It remains unclear to what extent the contract would open the door to a high-deductible health insurance plan, which the company has sought to implement in previous "final offers."

• **Allow the company to continue to mandate up to two hours of overtime per day**, meaning shifts of 11 or 12 hours for many workers, leaving little time to spend with their families.

In addition, the contract retains the hated tier system and does nothing to restore pensions, concessions previously given up by the UAW bureaucracy in earlier sellout agreements.

A decisive rejection of the company's arrogant demands would reverberate far beyond Wisconsin and Iowa. If workers at CNH insist that their essential needs are non-negotiable, it would galvanize support and encourage a rebellion throughout the working class, one which is already underway.

But a "no" vote, while necessary, is only the first step. In order for the strike to be won, it must be armed with a new strategy and new leadership.

The key to the situation is this: The isolation of the strike must be broken. Workers at Caterpillar, Stellantis, Ford, and elsewhere must be mobilized in a joint struggle for higher wages and decent working conditions. To link up

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these fights, bodies genuinely accountable to workers on the shop floor are needed: rank-and-file factory committees, comprised of the most militant and selfless workers, which will base themselves not on what the companies claim is affordable, but rather on what workers actually need.

Since the beginning of the strike in May, workers at CNH have shown enormous courage and determination, seeking to win significant improvements under conditions in which CNH is highly profitable. “CNH has treated us union workers like we are worthless,” a veteran worker in Racine told the WSWS. “Yet when they needed us during COVID, we worked, and we worked three to four weekends a month.”

“We’re tired of being overworked. We want to spend time with our families, and have money to spend with our families. It’s bigger than us. We’re fighting for the next generation.”

But while workers have demonstrated immense resilience, the UAW bureaucracy has worked to keep the strike isolated and starved workers on poverty-level strike pay, with the aim of ultimately wearing down workers’ resistance and imposing the demands of the company.

The announcement of the contract vote was the first mention of the strike by international UAW headquarters on its website since May 24, the first month of the strike. The UAW officialdom, working for the benefit of management, has followed a well-worn playbook, carrying out a virtual information blackout on the strike, keeping its hundreds of thousands of members in the dark, just as it did during the Volvo Trucks strike in 2021.

At the same time, the UAW has doled out just $400 a week in strike pay from the union’s massive $800 million strike fund, forcing many strikers to take on second or third jobs. Over the summer, the UAW’s ruling faction forced through a reversal in a vote to raise strike pay to $500 a week on the last day of the union’s convention. Meanwhile, hundreds of officials at the UAW’s “Solidarity House” headquarters have continued to collect their six-figure salaries for the duration of the strike.

The reality is that workers are seeking to overturn painful concessions previously handed over to the companies by the corrupt UAW bureaucracy, which has shown itself time and time again to be a tool of management. Former UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell—who oversaw pro-company deals at Deere and Fiat Chrysler—pleaded guilty to accepting bribes from FCA management. UAW Vice President Chuck Browning, the current head of the UAW’s Agricultural Implement department, himself served as a top aide to former UAW President Dennis Williams, who pleaded guilty for his part in a conspiracy to embezzle millions in workers’ dues money.

As many workers at CNH sense, much more is at stake than simply their own contract. Everywhere, workers are looking to reverse the long-term decline in their living standards. In 2021, workers waged heroic strikes at Volvo Trucks and John Deere, both of which saw massive, 90 percent “no” votes rejecting pro-company, UAW-endorsed contracts. This year, workers face major contract battles at Caterpillar, Mack Trucks, and the Big Three auto companies.

The fight at CNH is one part of an international upsurge of class struggle over the past two years. Around the world, workers are entering into struggle against soaring inflation, social inequality and unbearable working conditions. Faced with this rising tide of opposition and a growing economic crisis of its own making, the ruling class has sought to ruthlessly defend its wealth and privileges, and is preparing to dramatically escalate its campaign of cost-cutting and layoffs this year.

What is needed is a new leadership in the working class, one which seeks to unite workers internationally around their common class interests, and which fights to defend them consciously and uncompromisingly.

Will Lehman, a second-tier worker at Mack Trucks in Pennsylvania, has run for UAW International president over the past year on such a program. He has called for the abolition of the corrupt UAW bureaucracy and the transfer of power to rank-and-file workers on the shop floor. Lehman has repeatedly appealed to workers throughout the UAW to mobilize in support of the CNH strike, and for workers to be provided their full income in strike pay.

We urge CNH workers: vote “no” to concessions! Form rank-and-file committees to unite with workers at Caterpillar, Deere and the auto companies! Join the movement to put power in the hands of rank-and-file workers!

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