

UAW Local 180 suppresses strike by CNH Industrial workers in Racine, Wisconsin

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CNH Industrial announced on May 9th that UAW Local 180 had ratified a 5-year collective bargaining agreement. The deal covers 300 workers at CNH's Racine County, Wisconsin, facility, which was previously the site of a protracted, nearly 9-month long strike in 2022-2023.

CNH manufactures a series of Case IH high-horsepower tractors at its Racine facility. These tractors are used in a variety of large-scale agricultural operations including tillage, planting, application of pesticides and fertilizers and hauling of grain carts, among others.

The agreement blocked strike action after the expiration of the previous agreement on May 2nd. The UAW announced the deal on its X/Twitter account on May 4, presenting it as a done deal before the rank and file had a chance to read it.

Workers are demanding higher wages and improved benefits, while CNH was insisting that such demands placed the “competitiveness” of the facility at risk. Nevertheless, the company's net income grew 189 percent between 2017 and 2021, while CEO compensation more than tripled over the same period.

The ratification followed a blatant corporate intimidation. CNH had recently implemented a contract with the Mount Pleasant Village Board to secure the services of the local police in the event that a strike took place. The terms of that contract specified that CNH would reimburse the costs of stationing Mount Pleasant police immediately outside plant gates.

The UAW claims that over the life of the agreement, production employees would see 22 percent general wage increases and skilled trade employees would see 29 percent increases.

It also claimed that the deal includes “health and safety language improvements, healthcare

enhancements, and improvements to retirement benefits” but provided no details.

Given the intimidation, the speed of the settlement and the UAW's refusal to release the full contract terms, there is every reason to conclude this is a significant sellout that fails to meet workers' demands.

Wages in the deal will increase 22 percent over 5 years. At 4.4 percent per year on average, this is almost entirely offset by inflation, currently sitting at 4.1 percent in the Midwest. For skilled trades, wages will increase by 29 percent over 5 years.

Inflation is on the rise. The US war against Iran and the resulting closure of the Strait of Hormuz—through which 20 percent of the world's crude oil once flowed—has sent energy prices soaring, with US oil crossing \$100 a barrel and the shock rippling through to food, materials, transport and consumer goods broadly.

Core inflation, which excludes food and energy, also rose 0.4 percent in April and 2.8 percent year over year, reflecting pressures that predate and extend beyond the energy shock. Traders now forecast headline inflation approaching 5 percent this year.

The 2026 negotiations cannot be separated from the bitter experience of the 2022–2023 strike, which was one of the longest and most hard-fought labor battles in Racine's recent history. The nearly nine-month strike of 2022–2023 revealed with brutal clarity not only CNH management's intransigence but the role of the UAW apparatus as an active obstacle to workers winning their demands.

On May 2, 2022, over 1,000 workers at the CNH plants in Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin, and Burlington, Iowa, walked out for the first time in 18 years. Workers were demanding a \$10-an-hour raise, restoration of cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), an end to the two-tier wage system, real pension benefits and relief from the

mandatory 11- and 12-hour shifts that had become standard.

As one Racine worker told the *World Socialist Web Site* at the time: “What I make is not a livable wage in this day and age.”

Veteran workers were earning \$20–22 an hour assembling tractors that sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars, while CNH’s net income had grown 189 percent between 2017 and 2021 and CEO compensation had more than tripled.

CNH immediately bussed in replacement workers the same day to continue production. Rather than mobilizing its hundreds of thousands of members in support, the UAW International posted just two statements about the strike on its national website for the entirety of 2022, maintaining a deliberate information blackout.

Strike pay was set at \$275 a week—later raised to \$400—drawn from an \$800 million strike fund. UAW Vice President Chuck Browning, formally responsible for the Agricultural Implements Department, continued drawing annual compensation exceeding \$208,000.

By that time, at 225 days, the Racine strike had become one of the longest UAW strikes since the Caterpillar strike of 1994–95. In the course of the strike, workers also sought to fight the UAW’s isolation by forming the CNH Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

In January 2023, the UAW brought CNH’s “last, best and final offer” to a vote. Workers rejected it by 55 to 45 percent. “The contract was a joke,” a Burlington worker told the WSWS. It excluded COLA entirely, allowed mandatory overtime, raised health care premiums and created a new health care tier forcing new hires onto high-deductible plans.

Two weeks later, the UAW rushed through a second vote on a contract workers described as virtually unchanged, giving some workers as little as two-days notice.

At the ratification meeting, UAW lawyers told workers that CNH would begin hiring permanent replacements on Monday if they voted no again. Faced with this explicit ultimatum after eight months of financial hardship, the contract narrowly passed. One Racine worker who voted against it told the WSWS the deal was “complete garbage.”

The 2023 contract—which the 2026 agreement directly

succeeds—locked in a new health care tier for new hires, excluded COLA, permitted mandatory overtime and allowed health care premiums to rise with no cap in years three and four.

Notably, the Burlington plant involved in the 2022-2023 struggle is now slated for closure.

But workers are striving to oppose more sellouts across the country, while the bureaucracy is scrambling to contain it. Nexteer Automotive workers in Saginaw, Michigan, rejected a UAW-backed contract by 96 percent in April 2026, then rejected a second sellout by 73 percent.

Elections are taking place for the UAW’s Constitutional Convention, where candidates will be nominated for the union’s leadership elections in November. Current UAW President Shawn Fain has unveiled a so-called “Stand Up Slate” of 13 candidates, including Brandon Campbell, who oversaw the betrayal of the nine-month CNH Industrial strike in 2022–23.

To oppose Fain and Campbell, CNH workers in Racine and across the UAW should support the campaign of Will Lehman for UAW president. Lehman, a 38-year-old Mack Trucks worker from Macungie, Pennsylvania, is running on an explicitly socialist and internationalist program that puts into practice what the CNH experience has demonstrated in principle: The UAW bureaucracy cannot be reformed—it must be abolished and replaced by rank-and-file power. Workers should demand their local send delegates to the UAW Constitutional Convention that support Lehman.

CNH workers must reinvigorate and expand the CNH Rank-and-File Committee, developing and publishing a set of demands from the shop floor and independent of union bureaucrats. Contact cnhrfc@gmail.com.



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