John Deere workers reject 2-year contract extension

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On Sunday, some 10,000 John Deere workers across Iowa, Illinois and Kansas rejected the company's two-year contract extension. The vote preserves the current agreement's expiration date of October 31, 2027, setting the stage for another contract battle six years after the 34-day Deere strike of 2021, which was betrayed and shut down by the United Auto Workers. Neither the UAW nor Deere has released the vote totals.

Deere had proposed extending the contract through October 2029. It offered 4 percent wage increases in 2026 and 2027 and a one-time $3,000 bonus. An existing 3 percent qualified earnings lump-sum payment scheduled for fall 2026 would have been moved to fall 2028.

A 4 percent wage increase sits just above the official July 2026 CPI inflation rate of 3.4 percent. The extension largely preserved the existing contract structure, including the tier system, the Continuous Improvement Pay Plan (CIPP) and the failure to restore retiree healthcare for post-1997 hires.

The UAW recommended the proposal be rejected, but the apparatus's decision to put Deere's extension proposal to a vote at all is a betrayal. There was nothing to vote on. Deere came to the union seeking two additional years of labor peace while 1,600 workers remain laid off, the company sits on $10.28 billion in cash and marketable securities, and every rotten feature of the 2021 sellout—the tier system, the CIPP, the absence of retiree healthcare—stays locked in place.

That the apparatus even entertained the proposal is a warning for 2027. The same bureaucracy that shut down the 2021 strike, forced three votes until exhaustion produced a "yes," and just awarded itself raises of up to $30,000 at the constitutional convention while blocking a promised dues reduction for members. Workers must draw the conclusion now: The fight against Deere cannot be separated from the fight against the UAW apparatus. A rebellion against the apparatus and the development of new organizational structures independent of the union bureaucracy, management and both corporate parties, is the only path to victory. This is what the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee was founded to fight for in 2021.

The rejection is part of a mounting wave of working-class opposition spreading across industries. The *World Socialist Web Site* has counted at least 16 union-endorsed tentative agreements rejected by workers in 2026. At Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan, workers rejected three successive contracts—by 96 percent, 73 percent and 55 percent—and voted by 86 percent to authorize a strike. The UAW brought back a fourth deal and held the ratification vote on company property. It was declared ratified 57–43 percent. Antwiane Sanders, a worker who was an outspoken opponent of the agreement, was also fired before the vote.

At American Axle, Local 2093 workers conducted a 10-day strike and later ratified a new agreement by approximately 80 percent. At Bridgewater Interiors, workers initially rejected an agreement by roughly 95 percent but ratified a revised agreement by 80 percent on June 30. Just two days before Deere workers voted, on August 21, some 17,000 Boeing engineers and technical workers, members of SPEEA (Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace), rejected four-year contract proposals—64 percent of the engineering unit and 72 percent of the technical unit voted no—and overwhelmingly authorized a strike, which could take place as soon as October 7.

Meanwhile, Deere's demand for concessions comes as the company posts enormous profits. It earned $5.03 billion in Fiscal Year 2025. Days before the vote, it raised its Fiscal Year 2026 net-income outlook to $4.75–$5 billion. As of its most recent filing, it held $9.3 billion in cash and short-term investments.

In 2025, it spent $1.1 billion on stock buybacks and paid

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shareholders $1.7 billion in dividends. Another $7.4 billion remained authorized for future stock buybacks as of May 2026. CEO John May received $27.9 million in total compensation.

Blaming a downturn in the agricultural sector, lower commodity prices, higher interest rates and tariff-related costs, in August 2025, it laid off 238 workers, including 71 at its Waterloo Foundry. Since 2015, Deere has cut thousands of jobs across the Midwest while its share price soared and dividends flowed.

At the UAW's 39th Constitutional Convention in Detroit, held June 15–18, delegates voted for raises of $10,000 to $30,000 for top officers. Fain's 2025 gross salary was $245,390; his total compensation reached $276,378.

The UAW spent $107.1 million on salaries for approximately 950 staff members in 2025. The union holds $1.25 billion in assets, with $857 million in investments and roughly $140 million in Treasury securities. The convention also blocked a dues reduction that members had been promised. Former UAW President Ray Curry, who presided over the 2021 Deere contract, was welcomed back as a guest of honor.

Will Lehman, socialist autoworker running for union president: "Build rank-and-file committees"

Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president, called the extension "a preemptive strike against the membership" in a statement issued in July. He called on Deere workers to reject the vote outright. There was, he argued, nothing to vote on.

Lehman drew a direct line from Deere to Nexteer. "That is your future if you let the apparatus handle this," he warned. "An 'unexpected' extension, a below-inflation raise [inflation was 4.2 percent at the time the statement was published], a one-time bonus, a deadline designed to stop a fight—It's the Nexteer playbook in a different suit."

His statement closed with the internationalist perspective that separates a rank-and-file movement from the nationalism of the apparatus: "Mexican and German workers are not your enemies. The enemy is in the boardrooms in Moline and at Solidarity House in Detroit."

Lehman's campaign for UAW president advances a program to abolish the union bureaucracy, transfer power and control over the union's resources to workers on the shop floor, and build rank-and-file committees independent of the apparatus and both corporate parties. Lehman has called on Deere workers to revive the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which played a decisive role in the 2021 strike, and to link up with workers at the Big Three, Nexteer, American Axle, Dana, Magna, Bridgewater Interiors and CNH through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Two roads lie ahead. One leads toward the continued rebellion of Deere workers—the revival of the rank-and-file committee, the building of an organization independent of the UAW apparatus and both corporate parties, and the preparation of a fighting strategy for 2027 based on the unity of workers across plants and across borders.

The other leads toward the smothering of that rebellion by the apparatus. The same bureaucracy that shut down the 2021 strike, that forced three votes until exhaustion, that raised its own pay while blocking a dues reduction for members—This bureaucracy has not changed. It will spend the next 14 months working to isolate, demoralize and contain the very forces that produced Sunday's result.

The outcome will be determined by what workers do, starting now. The key question is building rank-and-file committees consisting of trusted workers at every plant to fight the inevitable sabotage by the UAW bureaucracy, give workers the means to assert democratic control over their own struggle and appeal for support across the entire UAW membership, the auto industry and the working class as a whole.

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