DEERE WORKERS: THE TWO-YEAR CONTRACT EXTENSION IS A TRAP. BUILD RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEES NOW TO STOP ANOTHER SELLOUT BY THE UAW APPARATUS



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

Brothers and Sisters at Deere,

Agricultural equipment maker John Deere has proposed a two-year contract extension for 10,000 UAW members in Iowa, Illinois and Kansas, with management saying it needed "stability" in a "period of economic volatility." The current six-year deal, imposed after the sellout of the 35-day strike in 2021, is set to expire in October 2027. Far from rejecting management's proposal, UAW officials say they will bring it to a vote by the membership.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Will Lehman. I'm a Mack Trucks assembly worker from Macungie, Pennsylvania, running for president of the UAW. Some of you remember me from 2022, when supporters of my campaign spoke with workers at your plants in Waterloo and the Quad Cities. You proved in 2021 that Deere workers are ready to fight—five weeks on strike, two sellout contracts voted down. You were betrayed by the UAW apparatus then. They're trying to do it again.

Here's the situation. Deere has walked in with a voluntary proposal—not a negotiated agreement—to extend your contract from October 2027 to October 2029. The terms: 4 percent wage increases in 2026 and 2027, a $3,000 one-time bonus this November, and everything else in the 2021 contract locked in place. The deadline: midnight, August 31. No full contract language has been released.

This is a preemptive strike against the membership. Deere and the UAW apparatus have watched Nexteer workers vote down three contracts. They've watched American Axle workers walk out. They've watched Dana workers reject UAW-backed deals by 90 percent margins. They are terrified that Deere workers might lead the fight again—and they're trying to lock you in before you can organize.

DO THE MATH

Four percent—with a war on Iran driving up fuel costs, with Trump's tariffs hitting Deere for $600 million that the company will pass straight to you, with food prices climbing. Four percent is a pay cut in real terms. The $3,000 bonus is a one-time payment that disappears. It doesn't compound. It doesn't build your pension. It's the cheapest way to buy two years of labor peace.

Meanwhile, Deere laid off 238 workers in August 2025—including 71 at its Waterloo Foundry—while holding roughly $9.3 billion in cash and short-term investments. Its stock has gained approximately 180 percent over the past five years, and it paid shareholders $6.48 per share in annual dividends. The company reported $1.289 billion in net income in its third quarter of fiscal 2025. Salaried employees received no general merit increase for fiscal 2026—zero.

Four percent and a bonus, while the company swims in billions. That's not a serious offer.

"PRESERVES ALL TERMS"

The current agreement is the 2021 contract—rammed through after you rejected the first TA by 90 percent and struck for five weeks. It entrenched the tier system, left CIPP in management's hands, and failed to restore retiree health care. UAW officials forced three votes until exhaustion produced a "yes," while a local vice president openly suggested Waterloo's work be outsourced to Mexico because workers opposed it. "Preserving all terms" locks that sellout in place until 2029.

And look at what's missing: no changes to the tier system, no job security, no layoff moratorium, no retiree health care. The company hasn't even pretended to address what workers need.

THE UAW IS A UNION IN NAME ONLY

Last month in Detroit, while Deere prepared this offer, the UAW convention voted raises of $10,000 to $30,000 for top officers. This is on top of the $276,000 salary Shawn Fain was already drawing. The apparatus consumes $90 to $100 million in payroll annually—nearly 470 employees taking home over $100,000 a year—while sitting on $1.1 billion in assets, $800 million of it speculating on Wall Street.

At the same convention, the bureaucracy blocked a dues reduction members were promised, raised strike pay by a measly $50 a week, and said nothing about Nexteer, American Axle or Dana. But former UAW President Ray Curry—who presided over the 2021 Deere sellout—was welcomed back as a guest of honor.

This bureaucracy can't be reformed. It must be abolished. The union's $1.1 billion, built from our dues, must be placed under the democratic control of the rank and file.

THE NEXTEER PLAYBOOK

Nexteer workers rejected contracts by 96 percent, then 73 percent, then 55 percent—and authorized a strike by 86 percent. The UAW ignored the mandate, brought back the same deal a fourth time, held the vote on company property, where every "no" voter could be identified, fired veteran worker Antwiane Sanders for criticizing a UAW rep, and declared it ratified. The top rate: $27 an hour—the same rate GM workers at Saginaw Steering Gear made in 2005, even though the cost of living is 70 percent higher today.

That is your future if you let the apparatus handle this. An "unexpected" extension, a below-inflation raise, a one-time bonus, a deadline designed to stop a fight—it's the Nexteer playbook in a different suit.

WHAT YOU MUST DO

Reject the extension outright. You already have a contract. You voted on it. It expires in October 2027. Deere is asking you to tear it up two years early and lock in a sellout until 2029—with no negotiations, no full contract language, and a deadline designed to prevent organizing. There is nothing to vote on. Refuse it.

Rebuild the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee now. The committee was the decisive achievement of 2021. Without it, the fury of workers who voted down a contract by 90 percent would have had no organized form. With it, that opposition became a conscious force. It must be revived now—independent of the UAW bureaucracy and both corporate parties—to prepare for the fight when this contract expires.

Connect this fight. The Big Three, Nexteer, American Axle, Dana, Magna, Bridgewater Interiors, CNH—these are not separate struggles. They are one struggle against the same corporations, the same apparatus, the same profit system. Join the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

Build international solidarity. Deere operates in Germany, France, Brazil, India and Mexico. In 2021, German and French Deere workers supported your strike. Mexican and German workers are not your enemies. The enemy is in the boardroom in Moline and at Solidarity House in Detroit.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved