

# United States: John Deere workers win

Thursday 2 December 2021, by [MIAH Malik](#) (Date first published: 27 November 2021).

## **The United States labour movement won its biggest victory in years on November 17.**

John Deere workers began militant strike action in the mid-west in October, stood up against a powerful employer — and, when necessary, their own national union leadership — and won.

Strikes in many industries and sectors have been rolling across the country since October. However, the strike at Deere, the giant manufacturer of farm and construction equipment, has come to symbolise a new era of union militancy.

Its significance goes beyond what the workers accomplished, because the victory was won by strikers located in regions and states with politically conservative governments.

The United Auto Workers (UAW), which represents the workers, announced that 10,000 UAW members ratified a new six-year agreement by a vote of 61% to 39%. They had rejected two previous offers.

According to the *Washington Post*: “The Deere strike — the first at the company since 1986 — is a prominent symbol of the impact the pandemic has had on the economy. Nearly two years of lockdowns and economic tumult have sparked a wave of labor activism, causing many workers to push for better conditions.” [1]

The UAW said: “John Deere members did not just unite themselves, they seemed to unite the nation in a struggle for fairness in the workplace. We could not be more proud of these UAW members and their families.”

Iowa’s *Des Moines Register* reported that the strike took place “in a year when thousands of other workers also have gone on strike and millions quit their jobs, sending employers scrambling to find replacements in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic”. [2]

More than 7000 Deere workers are employed in Iowa and the strikers had wide public support in that state.

A Des Moines Register/Mediacom poll conducted over November 7–10 showed 58% of the state’s adults “mostly sided with the workers, with just 16% mostly siding with Deere. Support cut across political, age, gender, income, educational, urban and rural divides.” [3]

The *Des Moines Register* also reported that in Waterloo, the largest John Deere local (workplace branch) of the UAW, with about 3000 members, 44% of members approved the contract. While still in the minority, the “yes” vote grew from 29% on November 2, when the previous offer was voted on.

“In Ankeny, 64% approved the contract, up from 51%. In Davenport, 77% approved the contract, up from 64%. In Ottumwa, 75% approved the contract, up from 61%.”

The first proposed agreement negotiated between the UAW and employers and roundly rejected by workers back in October offered pay rises of 5-6%, depending on performance, with an additional 3% rise in 2023 and 2025. However, it also proposed to eliminate pensions for new employees.

The second agreement rejected by Deere workers offered a 10% pay rise, an \$8500 sign-on bonus, and 5% pay rises in 2023 and 2025. The ballot was defeated by a smaller margin of 10% (55% to 45%).

The third agreement "tweaked" how the company calculated bonuses for reaching production targets, and protected a defined benefit pension program for new employees. A two-tier wage structure, which would pay new workers less for doing the same job, was rejected by workers.

Former president Donald Trump and the anti-union Republican Party received majority support in the 2020 presidential elections in Iowa.

However, the strike focused on economic issues and most local politicians had to side with the strikers.

The victory at Deere has led many bosses to back down on calls for new concessions, as they rake in billions of dollars in profits during the pandemic.

One of the largest healthcare providers in California, Kaiser Permanente, backed down on demanding a two-tier wage system and other concessions, and settled a new agreement with most of its workforce before they walked off the job.

The John Deere workers' victory has and will encourage other workers to stand firm.

**Malik Miah**

California

---

**P.S.**

- GLW, Issue 1328. November 27, 2021:  
<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/united-states-john-deere-workers-win>
- 

**Footnotes**

- [1] <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/10/14/john-deere-workers-strike/>
- [2] <https://eu.desmoinesregister.com/story/money/business/2021/10/18/how-john-deere-strike-2021-uaw-kellogg-covid-era-reminds-experts-post-world-war-ii-labor-strife/8420617002/>
- [3] <https://eu.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/iowa-poll/2021/11/15/iowa-poll-majority-support-uaw-workers-over-company-deere-strike/6376829001/>