

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING



John Deere battle ends with historic gains for strikers

Workers stood solid for five weeks and won big, rejecting a plan to cut pensions for new hires.

On Nov. 17, United Auto Workers announced the end of a strike by 10,100 John Deere workers at 12 facilities in three states. Workers ratified a new six-year collective bargaining agreement, after having voted down two previous tentative agreements presented by the union. After five weeks on strike, they doubled their raises, won back their COLA, and beat back a company proposal to eliminate pensions for new hires.

The strike began Oct. 14 after workers rejected—by 90%—a tentative contract agreement that would have eliminated the pension for new hires and raised pay just 11% over six years. It was the first strike by workers at John Deere since 1986.

Despite the hardship of getting by on \$275 in weekly strike pay, workers signaled they were determined to stay out, and John Deere got the message.

A second agreement doubled the raises and dropped the pension cut. But it too was rejected, by 55% on Nov. 2. The company said it would not improve its economic offer further. But it did, at least slightly.

Approved by 61% of workers, the final agreement includes:

- a \$8,500 ratification bonus
- 10% immediate raises, and 5% raises in the third and fifth years, amounting to a 20% pay increases over the six year term, or roughly \$6-\$9 hour
- lump sum bonuses equal to 3% of annual pay in the second, fourth and sixth years
- continued no-premium health insurance coverage, and earlier health insurance eligibility for new hires

Workers didn't get everything they wanted. The new contract continues a two-decade-old two-tier arrangement that cut retiree health care and offered slightly lower pay for employees hired after 1997.

John Deere is doing fine. Soon after the strike, the company announced it's on track to make over \$5.7 billion in profit this year amid a boom in farm equipment sales.

—DM

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