

“We need every worker from around the world to have a day of action against Caterpillar”

A WSWS reporting team
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Locked-out Electro-Motive Diesel workers and their supporters spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* at the Day of Action held Saturday in London, Ontario. Heavy equipment maker Caterpillar locked out 475 workers at its locomotive assembly facility in London on January 1, demanding wage cuts of more than 50 percent along with the elimination of benefits and pensions.

The lockout of Electro-Motive workers follows the lockout of over 1,000 workers at a Cooper Tire facility in Findlay, Ohio on November 28, and the lockout by Rio Tinto Alcan of 750 workers at a smelter in Alma, Quebec earlier this month.

Tanya Hill, wife of a locked-out Electro-Motive worker, told the WSWS, “My husband has 23 years. They offered packages to the old GM people, and he was too young to take it. He had more years than some people that got it.

“I know that lots of workers are going to lose their houses if they have one person working in the family—how are they going to afford things? We are fortunate because I went back to work 10 years ago so we can scrape by. A lot of people are in a tough spot, where they have only been 5 or 6 years with a company.

“It is corporate greed. They are showing people what they are going to do and they are just going to go around the world. This is a fight for everybody. We may not go back and we know that. We are fighting against corporations. They should take responsibility for the social damage they have done to people’s lives. It has woken us up. I mean we knew about it, but now we are becoming more active, more vocal.

“Our government is not going to save us. It is not just about unions, it is about people. It has been kind of a crappy life for the last 20 years. We have been on a wheel going round and round. Working harder and harder, and for what?

“My worry is what is going to happen next year when we have an austerity package coming in? In London they are talking about cutting all kinds of services. And the federal government is too. The cuts they gave the corporations, all these tax incentives, who is paying for this? There are no regulations anymore. They can lock us out, but we can’t get unemployment. That makes it easy for them.”

Christina, Ellery and Angela are students of social work at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

“We are studying what is happening from the perspective of social justice,” Christina said. “Electro-Motive wants to cut wages by 55 percent. This would mean letting the corporations disregard their union contracts.”

“It is a growing trend everywhere,” Angela added.

Ellery said, “People work so hard to get good wages, pensions and benefits. As a young person coming into the workforce, I wonder if this is all that we can expect?”

Angela noted, “There are several thousand people here. It shows a growing reaction against what’s going on. People from the Occupy movement are here. This is produced by everything that is happening. It is becoming a global movement.”

“Our government gave Caterpillar huge tax cuts, and they have turned around to attack the workers. That is one reason people are angry.”

“There is a need for more cooperation. People are responding to the fact that this is not an isolated case. It is happening in Egypt, in Ireland, the UK, everywhere.”

Brian Gibson from London came to show solidarity with the locked-out workers. He said, “Caterpillar is enjoying record profits and the workers are being locked out. It is not a normal union dispute. It is ‘you are being locked out unless you accept these 50 percent cuts.’

“I am self-employed, but I understand what the workers are going through. I have been down a couple times to the factory to listen and hear what the workers have to say. Some have even said they feel they are in the eye of the storm. That this may be the situation that tips the balance. This has been happening for decades, but not to this level of audacity. Sometimes it’s small cuts, nothing like fifty percent. If Caterpillar is able to do this, other groups of workers feel like they will be next.

“Workers in Muncie (Indiana) are showing solidarity with our workers. It is being said ‘we will just bring the work down there for sixteen dollars an hour.’ And the Muncie workers are saying ‘why are we only worth half of what a Canadian is getting?’ It will absolutely have a ripple effect.”

Jay McIntosh has five years with Electro-Motive. “It is corporate greed,” he said. “The profits are just out to lunch. Some of this wealth that is being generated by this corporation should be shared with workers.

“Caterpillar has a hundred plus plants in the United States and they also have plants worldwide. They are worried that the rest of their plants will start to see that the way they are being treated is unjust. If one plant sets this in motion, people are starting to realize they are being treated unfairly. I think Caterpillar has opened a big can of worms here they didn’t realize they were going to.

“I just want to say that as a worker at Electro-Motive when we first voted to give our union the right to go on strike if they chose to, we voted 98 percent to do that. We had no idea we would get the support we are getting from other unions and the community. Nonunion people, everybody. It is just incredible.”

Anthony Ivankovic, a retired auto worker, told the WSW, “I had about 34-35 years in the factories. I am here because of all the inequities in the world. The workers are being hit hard. The poor people are getting hit more and more. This is having a devastating effect on workers, on their families.

“We are all struggling and it seems like a small percentage around the world are getting super-rich and super-powerful.

“You are seeing now the riots and rebellions in the Middle East against the super-rich and tyrants. It is just the beginning. I think it is going to spread as things get worse to the United States and Canada eventually.”

Steve Feagan, a salt miner from Goderich, Ontario, and a member of Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada Local 16-0, said, “We are owned by a company in Kansas. We know exactly what their tactics are going to be because they forced the union out in Louisiana and held them out for two years trying to break them. They brought in replacement workers.

“There is an eerie similarity with what was going on in Louisiana. There are 400 workers at our mine. Our contract expires in April. It might be that we will be going out the door or locked out. Everyone is a little anxious.”

Rick Morgan, a steelworker, has been on strike at ECP in Brantford, Ontario for three years. He explained that his view of life had undergone a complete change during that time.

“They had a big march for us just like this one. This is the same noise I have been hearing for three years, and nothing has changed. I came here to support the workers. I have been through it. I know what they are up against.

“They wanted a 25 percent cut in wages and a change in the pension plan. They wanted to cut our benefits 50 percent. We used to have six weeks vacation as the maximum benefit. They would cut it to four weeks.

“We stood on the line for three years and watched as scab labor went in to do our jobs. The police station was right there. Anything we did brought the police. We could not even delay the scab buses.

“At one point, the judge gave me a 65-day suspension from picketing. I had made some comments on Facebook, which I thought were humorous and would relieve some of the tension. This was presented as a criminal offense.

“I have learned a lot in the last three years. Most of my life I just went to work without paying attention to what was happening in other parts of the world. It takes getting hit over the head to realize you have to fight for something. People all over the world are in the same boat as we are. There is a big possibility to do something.

“I feel the union system is watered down so much that it is worse than useless. We need something like a globalized union. The only way to step up to these people is with worldwide struggle, both union and nonunion. We all face the same thing. We have to stand together as human beings. We have the right to live.

“It took me the last three years to understand what is going on. It is like relearning everything I ever knew. We have to see the world as one whole. I have seven grandchildren. They have no future unless we change it now. The way I see it now, it does matter what happens in China and Nicaragua.”

Doug McMillan, a worker at Veyance Technologies in Owen Sound, a member of the United Steelworkers, recounted the experience of workers at his plant, which makes V belts for the auto and mining industries. “I imagine there are a lot of similarities (with the Electro-Motive workers). I guess these corporations don’t want to have anything to do with pensions anymore.

“It used to be Goodyear but now it is Veyance Technologies. The Ontario Pension Commission came to us a few years ago and said to us,

‘your pensions are underfunded. I guess there was a whole bunch of money missing. We all went out together, shut down 12 plants. The first time for 3 or 4 weeks. In three years we struck again, trying to get them to put this money back in the pension fund. This was five years ago. That time we were out for 12 weeks.

“We worked all our lives and contributed to these funds. They are supposed to grow if the money is not there. After 12 weeks they agreed there was \$6 billion missing and they agreed to put it back.”

Edward Taylor, a London Electro-Motive worker, has worked at the factory for seven years. “We are three weeks in. There is still a lot of positivity. It is very easy to see how the negativity is going to creep in. A month from now, two months from now people are going to start getting desperate.

“It’s tough. You’ve got to find a way to make \$200 a week last for a family of four. That’s hard.

“They have guys who have been on the picket line for 26 or 27 months now. And scabs are going across and doing their jobs.

“We need a Caterpillar day of action. We need every worker from around the world to have a day of action against Caterpillar. It can’t just be this location or that location.

Adam Vandennakker, 25, works as a disc jockey and was active in the Occupy London movement, which was recently disbanded by police. “After they had torn up the park, taken us out of our tents and destroyed all of our property, I decided to go back to the park and give people information about what we stood for.

“The cops came and arrested me at exactly 10 p.m. Apparently, London has a curfew no one knows about. They put me in the cells for 10 hours with no phone call, no nothing. They are picking and choosing which laws to enforce. What I was doing was in the best interest of the public.

“What Electro-Motive is doing is an extremely greedy and unacceptable move on the part of a large corporation. It is a perfect example of why we all need to stick together and do something about this system. I do not mean another protest. By definition, a protest accepts the status quo.

“The problem is global, not municipal. The occupying movement is about the world waking up. We need a form of direct democracy, not the form of representative democracy in which the government is bought and paid for.

“You can take out all the Harpers you want, but what you are left with is still the capitalist system. That is what we need to target. Not Harper, not Bush, not Obama. The elected officials are no more than hood ornaments on a car.”



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