

Elect rank-and-file committees to oppose job cuts and end givebacks!

Vote “No” on the UAW-Caterpillar sellout agreement

WSWS Autoworker Newsletter
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The World Socialist Web Site *Autoworker Newsletter* calls on Caterpillar workers to reject the miserable sellout contract being pushed by the UAW at ratification votes scheduled for Sunday, March 26.

The UAW is trying to ram this six-year contract down the throats of workers without giving them time to read the entire proposal and associated “letters of understanding.” But even the bits and pieces of information the UAW has released in its deceitful “highlights” flyer make it clear this contract was dictated by the Caterpillar bosses and their Wall Street investors. It will allow the company to boost profits while CAT workers and their families suffer more job losses and falling living standards.

- The contract accepts the closure of the Aurora plant as an inevitability, excluding it from the so-called moratorium on factory closures. This is only a prelude to more mass layoffs and the piling up of more work on those who remain.

- The contract extends the assault on wages which has been carried out over decades, and maintains the hated two-tier system, which has divided and weakened workers. Those hired before 2005 will once again see their base pay frozen and no cost-of-living adjustments. Seeking to exploit the economic distress caused by years of union-backed concessions, the UAW hopes to bribe workers into taking this deal with \$1,000 lump-sum payment.

- Post-2005 workers will receive only two guaranteed wage increases of 2 percent each in 2018 and 2020, an insulting sum that will be more than eaten up by inflation and higher health costs. While the UAW claims these workers will be eligible in other years for “market-based wage increases” (an intentionally vague formulation), this

promise is worthless. Essentially, the UAW has “negotiated” that Caterpillar will unilaterally determine whether and how much of a raise workers receive.

- The highlights contain ominous implications for workers’ health care. Having agreed to a doubling of workers’ shares of premiums over the life of the 2011-2017 agreement, the UAW is now claiming that workers’ health care contributions will be limited by shifting them onto the same plans as management. However, no explicit guarantees are given of how much workers will be on the hook for over the life of the contract.

- Finally, the highlights make no mention of a host of critical issues, including the percentage of supplemental employees the company can employ or any changes to workers’ retirement plans. No doubt the most significant concessions would emerge only after a “yes” vote, as in previous contracts. In 2011, for example, the company and union finally pushed through the end of pension contributions for pre-2005 employees, who were forced into a 401(k) at the end of last year.

How many times has the UAW told workers that concessions are necessary to “save jobs”? But the thousands of layoffs Caterpillar has carried out over the last six years demonstrate that surrendering hard-won wages, health care, pensions and working conditions has not saved a single job. All that it saves are vast profits for the company and cozy positions for the UAW bureaucrats.

This contract will set a new low benchmark for a whole new wave of concessions demands on agricultural equipment workers and autoworkers. That underscores the fact that CAT workers are not just fighting for themselves but the next generation of all industrial workers.

Speaking for the company, UAW Vice President Norman Jewell and the other union bureaucrats insist that workers must pay for downturn in the global economy and falling demand. But workers did not cause these conditions and must not pay for them.

The company has earned tens of billions over the last 10 years, showering its CEOs with multi-million stock options and bonuses, and issuing \$1.8 billion in dividends to its investors last year. Caterpillar has billions stashed away in overseas subsidiaries, and is willing to squander many millions more to evade its tax bill and the consequences of its criminal activities. Former CEO Doug Oberhelman has gotten a golden parachute after destroying the lives of thousands of CAT workers.

According to the UAW and the company, no matter what the economic conditions, good or bad, workers must sacrifice everything to further enrich the billionaires and millionaires that rule this country and the world.

Enough is enough! It is time for CAT workers to take a stand for the whole working class. This means rejecting the corporatist outlook of the company agents in the UAW and insisting that the needs of workers and their families cannot be sacrificed on the altar of corporate profit any longer. Decades of plant closings, layoffs and wage cuts have left cities like Peoria, Decatur, Aurora and Joliet in ruin. Schools have closed, drug abuse and suicide are rampant and the next generation is condemned to poverty-level jobs.

Meanwhile, Dennis Williams pockets more than \$300,000 a year from the UAW and from his seat on Navistar's board of directors. Jewell, who couldn't show his face after Chrysler workers voted down his first sellout contract in 2015, makes at least \$200,000.

The anti-working-class character of the UAW was underscored by Williams's appearance two weeks ago with the President Donald Trump and the auto bosses in Michigan. The UAW is in a de facto alliance with the billionaire president, who wants to give Caterpillar and other corporations billions more in tax cuts, while destroying public education, health care and job safety and health programs.

The UAW is echoing Trump's poisonous lie that immigrants and foreign workers are the cause of plant closures and declining living standards. This is aimed at dividing and weakening the working class and preventing a common struggle against the real cause of this misery: the capitalist system, which lets the corporate and financial parasites rob the wealth produced by the collective labor of workers all over the globe.

to immediately elect rank-and-file committees, independent of the pro-corporate union, to draw up the demands that workers need.

These should include:

- A 35 percent wage increase and the restoration of COLA
- Fully funded pensions and employer-paid health care for active and retired workers
- No plant closings and the immediate reinstatement of all laid-off workers
- The abolition of the multi-tier wage and benefit schemes
- The conversion of all temporary and supplemental workers into full-time employees

These rank-and-file committees should reach out to all workers—Illinois state workers, teachers in Chicago and around the country, immigrant workers and other sections of workers and young people—to fight for the broadest mobilization of the working class to defend the social right to good-paying and secure jobs, quality health care and fully funded pensions.

A special appeal should be made to Caterpillar workers in Europe, Asia, Latin America and around the world who are facing similar attacks by this global company, which, along with the UAW, is forcing workers into a race to the bottom.

If the needs of the working class are to take precedence over the profits of top executives and wealthy shareholders, then the working class must build a powerful political movement that will oppose the capitalist system and the two big business parties, the Democrats and Republicans. The huge corporations like Caterpillar should be put under the collective and democratic ownership of the working class so the wealth that workers can control the wealth they create. That is the fight for socialism.

In this fight, the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* will give CAT workers all the assistance possible to publicize their struggle and unify with other workers facing the same battles.



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