

“The way I look at it is, the UAW is Caterpillar”

Caterpillar workers in Peoria, Illinois denounce UAW sellout deal

Our reporters
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The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is holding a call-in conference meeting, "The UAW's betrayal at Caterpillar: The case for rank-and-file committees" on Wednesday, March 29 at 7:00 pm, Central Time (8:00 pm EDT). To participate, call 213-416-1560 in the US or 438-800-2937 in Canada and enter PIN 581991086#.

On Sunday, some 5,000 Caterpillar workers in Illinois and Pennsylvania were forced by the United Auto Workers (UAW) to vote on a six-year sellout contract proposal, while only being given misleading “highlights” of the deal three days before. The UAW—working on behalf of the multibillion dollar corporation—coordinated an information blackout with the company throughout negotiations, seeking to keep concealed the painful concessions they were preparing.

Reporters from the World Socialist Web Site *Autoworker Newsletter* spoke to Caterpillar workers in Peoria, Illinois, on Sunday, distributing hundreds of leaflets urging workers to vote “no.” The overwhelming majority of workers expressed their contempt for the UAW-brokered deal and stated they would vote it down.

“I don’t really trust the highlights we got,” said Perry, a logistics worker with 10 years at Caterpillar. “We got these highlights only on Thursday and a lot of people didn’t get to read it till this weekend.

“They pushed our vote day back twice. They pushed it back and then they didn’t have the contract. We should have at least a week to study the contract. I don’t trust the highlights the UAW gave us. There’s always stuff in the contract we are going to have questions about.”

Scott, a second-tier worker with 12 years at Caterpillar, also expressed his hostility to the deal.

“Over the course of the contract, I still will not make full money,” he said. “I will have been there 18 years. It shows that the company and the union don’t care about us. On a union scale, we should be making \$36 an hour and instead we will only be making \$21.50 an hour. Caterpillar is basically screwing us. They have made billions and billions of dollars and they used to say they were ‘the company that cares.’ They don’t care about us. They only care about lining their own pockets.

“The UAW doesn’t represent us. There’s a lot of opposition and many people said they would vote ‘no,’ but there’s a lot of crookedness with the union. They may stuff the ballots with a ‘yes,’ vote. I heard they may have done some of this with the auto and Deere votes too. They voted down the contract and they still got the same rotten contract. During the Q&A before the vote, when we asked them questions, they just danced around and never really answered our questions.”

Rachel started working before the 2005 contract and expressed her hatred of the two-tier wage system. “How do we still have two tiers?” she asked. “I started here right before the UAW and Caterpillar brought in the two-tier system. When I stepped foot in the doors, I thought I’d be making a certain amount once I got full time and that’s when they went two-tier. I’ve been working next to people who make more money than me for the last 13 years and I’m sick of it. The UAW doesn’t even represent us anymore.

“Caterpillar likes to hire new people right before contract time because they are too scared to stand up for themselves and to strike if necessary. They try to frighten younger and newer workers. But I’ll never be

happy on a contract until we are all paid the same with cost-of-living adjustments added there on up.”

Rich chimed in, “I’ve worked here over 16 years. We used to get free insurance. That’s gone and now we pay so much out of pocket. I’m first-tier and I think it’s unfair to everyone that we even have tiers. Caterpillar is a multibillion dollar company. Why can’t they increase the base rate to \$30 dollars an hour or more? The next generation has nothing to look forward to. They want to take back what workers made in the 60’s and 70’s and 80’s. We also have two parties in the government that lie to us and the one percent keeps making money. I don’t trust any of our politicians.”

“The UAW carried out a news blackout and we had a one-hour meeting before the snap vote. I mean, how disingenuous can that be?” asked Darren, a worker of 22 years. “I can’t trust what’s going to be on that contract. They seem to be doing here what they did with the Big Three auto contract and with Deere.

“If the past contracts are any indicator, this one can’t be any good. Several people have commented that probably 90 percent of us will vote against it but it will still pass with like 50 percent. If Deere is any indication, it will probably be passed. It’ll be interesting if the local will acknowledge the ‘no’ votes or not. Even if we vote ‘no’ they will just probably send us back the same crappy contract. I mean this exactly, step by step, is what they did with John Deere.”

“I’ve been on the shop floor for more than 22 years. I think the idea of building rank-and-file committees is the only way to go. I don’t know the first idea about how to go about it, but I agree. I don’t know if I could stand in front of people and talk about it. The UAW said the union and the company are in agreement. Who are they talking about? Us? We are the rank-and-file.

“I really appreciate the *World Socialist Web Site* and your articles. It’s like the anti-FOX News and anti-CNN for me.”

Echoing a widespread suspicion of the ballot counting by UAW representatives, Charles said, “I noticed they had one little table set up at the end of where we get our ballots for an envelope. We had to stop and get an envelope, and they weren’t telling everyone this. But when you get to the ballot box, it says ‘ballots with envelopes only,’ so they’re probably not even going to count most of the votes, because

everyone was just stuffing their ballots in.”

Marcus, a Caterpillar worker for 15 years, commented on the contract highlights, “It’s not really highlights, it’s a manipulation of words to convince those who don’t know any better. It’s more or less the same status quo, just reworded.”

Pointing out the ruthless character of Caterpillar, he said, “As far as the last contract was concerned, it was a matter of, from my standpoint, we had a leg to stand on, because the ‘98 contract was really very fuzzy as to giving details whether or not it was saving your job. And once you realized that you still had a job, you were just happy that you were still there.

“This last one, I was at Mossville, and they had all of us who were safe sit in the bleachers. It was the coldest thing I’ve ever seen, they walked everybody out in front of us, all 700 of them who weren’t getting their jobs back, in front of our faces, while we sat there. I never felt more guilty—yet still relieved at the fact I’m still there.”

Regarding the role of the UAW, he said, “Well, they’re not here, so that tells you what you need right there. The way I look at it is, the UAW *is* Caterpillar. They don’t even wear union T-shirts anymore, they wear polos. My union steward goes fishing with my supervisor. That tells you something. That happened across the entire spectrum. With the IAM (International Association of Machinists) in Joliet too. The poor people of Aurora, their plant is closing. They sat there before all of us and said their bargaining committee approved this.

Dan, a Caterpillar worker with 20 years, spoke to the losses workers have suffered. He said, “All I’ve done is lost. I cannot think of one thing I’ve gained. The role of the UAW? I’m baffled to be honest with you. I wasn’t affected by two tier—but I voted ‘no.’ I do not understand that. Here we are 20 years, and we haven’t really gained anything.”



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