

Vote NO on the Anheuser-Busch sellout contract! Build rank-and-file committees to organize strike action!

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Anheuser-Busch workers: Tell us why you're voting against the contract! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges the 5,000 Anheuser-Busch workers in the United States to reject the new tentative agreement being pushed by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Workers must prepare for strike action under rank-and-file control, not under the union bureaucrats who canceled a strike at the last minute in favor of this sellout deal.

In a brief webinar Sunday afternoon, which lasted 30 minutes—a quarter of the two hours originally allotted, Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien and Jeff Padellaro, the head of the union's Brewery, Bakery and Soft Drink Conference, praised the deal as “historic,” drawing comparisons to last year's contract at UPS.

This reveals more than they planned to. Just as at Anheuser-Busch, the Teamsters bureaucrats claimed to be organizing a “strike-ready campaign” at UPS, only to spring a contract on workers at the last minute. That contract, which they claimed was “historic,” is being used now to carry out thousands of job cuts.

In other words, this contract is nothing more than a sequel to the “historic” sellout at UPS.

Workers are being forced to vote on this contract sight unseen, without having been given copies of the full contract, much less adequate time to study it. As one worker put it, “we just received some details of the new tentative agreement [on Saturday], are expected to show up at the union hall on Sunday to ask any questions about the agreement, and then vote in person Monday by 6 pm.”

This is reason enough to vote down the contract just on principle. If the Teamsters bureaucracy is attempting to ram through a five-year deal in the course of little more than a week, on the basis of only self-serving “highlights” provided by the bureaucracy itself, than it can only be because there are massive hidden concessions in the contract.

But even what is known from the bureaucracy's own statements are enough to confirm that the contract is a massive betrayal:

“The contract paves the way for brewery closures. Talking

out of both sides of their mouths, the bureaucracy claims the contract provides “job security” and prevents “permanent layoffs” while also stating it provides transfer rights in the event of brewery closures. In his report to the webinar on the contract's supposed “job security,” Teamsters lawyer Gabe Dumont admitted that there is “talk of brewery closures” in the near future.

According to Anheuser-Busch workers, there are at least three facilities rumored to be on the chopping block, Newark, New Jersey; Merrimack, New Hampshire and in California.

The contract does nothing to prevent this. It only includes transfer rights and financial assistance for workers who are forced to move if their home facility closes. If they choose not to relocate, “longer term” employees will receive an offer of a severance bonus to quit. What constitutes “long term” has not been clearly defined, meaning many workers who choose to leave could end up with nothing.

For workers who do not relocate, the company will “create” positions for “non-traditional work” in a “maintenance workforce.” This plan was not described in further detail. However, maintenance workers are highly skilled professionals who must pass a test to qualify. This led one worker to question whether these “non-traditional” jobs would be little more than grounds maintenance, i.e., janitors and gardeners. There is no indication whether these jobs will pay anything close to workers' existing wages.

“The pay increase is offset by inflation and the elimination of quarterly bonuses, leaving workers making less they did 25 years ago. Teamsters officials claim the \$8 per hour wage increase, spread out over five years, is the largest pay raise in company history. As a matter of fact, this is false. Adjusted for inflation, workers won \$12.50 in wage hikes over three years after the 1976 strike, more than double the average annual wage increases of the current contract.

The \$8 per hour increase amounts to 23 percent spread out over 5 years, barely equivalent to historic inflation over the past three years. Even Teamsters economist Justin Schweitzer was compelled to admit that average pay will be only slight better by the end of this contract than in 2019. However, even this is

doubtful, given the Teamsters' assumptions about future inflation.

Moreover, workers will be making less than they did before the 1998 contract, which included massive wage concessions. Based on the average wage figures Schweitzer gave, average workers was paid \$20.44 in 1998, worth \$39 an hour today. That buying power has been reduced through decades of sellout contracts. Anheuser-Busch and the Teamsters bureaucracy are using an immediate \$4 per hour wage increase, followed by four \$1 annual increases in the final four years of the contract, to prey upon workers' economic insecurity, due to inflation, to help smooth the contract's passage.

In addition to inflation, workers also report that the wage increases will be further partially offset by Anheuser-Busch's abolition of quarterly bonuses, which are generally worth between \$4,000 and \$5,000 a year depending on hours worked and department performance.

Health and welfare contributions will only increase by 20 cents an hour each year. This is woefully inadequate to maintain the health of the pension funds. According to a worker who spoke with the WSWs, the company's contributions are about \$9,000 a year per worker. Across 5,000 workers, this is just \$45 million a year, just over double what the company spent on Super Bowl ads this year. With just 20 cents in additional contributions each year the company will only spend an extra \$384 a year based on a 40 hour work week, or \$1.9 million for all workers.

The contract isolates the striking Molson Coors workers. Even if the contract were everything that the Teamsters apparatus said it was—and it is not—the decision to call off a strike at Anheuser-Busch leaves over 400 fellow Teamster members out to dry on the picket line in Fort Worth. Molson Coors is playing hardball with its workers at the brewery, demanding workers accept a contract with only an extra \$1 per hour in wage increases. To ratify this contract would only guarantee the isolation of these workers, paving the way for the strike's eventual defeat and imposition of an even worse contract.

These details are enough for workers to vote down this contract, which the WSWs urges them to do by the widest possible margin. But the very fact that this contract is being proposed also exposes the union bureaucracy as a tool of management.

There is more than enough money to meet all of workers' demands. AB Inbev, the owner of Anheuser-Busch, made \$59 billion in revenue and \$20 billion in profit, the company announced last week.

But while the Teamsters made noise for weeks about the likelihood and even inevitability of a strike, they had no intention of calling one. Everything was done for show, in order to present the sellout they had already cooked up with management as the product of a "credible strike threat." This is the exactly the same playbook the Teamsters used at UPS.

Meanwhile, workers were kept ignorant of what was being discussed behind closed doors with management. "Throughout the entire negotiation process, our local union would not tell us how much of a pay increase the union was asking [the company] for," one worker said. "They claim that they were not allowed to per the IBT lawyers! We were kept in the dark regarding wages this entire time!"

To make matter potentially worse, workers have informed the WSWs that the union is threatening to rescind the doubling of strike pay which they had announced last month if workers reject the tentative agreement. This would mean that even if forced to call a strike, they would try to starve workers out on the picket line.

Anheuser-Busch workers need a new strategy for victory. They cannot entrust their fight to the hands of bureaucrats whose real sympathies are with the other side. Instead, they have to organize themselves to enforce the will of the rank and file. The fight against the contract, therefore, must be combined with the fight to build rank-and-file committees at breweries across the US, as alternative leadership structures controlled by workers themselves.

The Anheuser-Busch contract comes amid the drive by corporations around the world to cut hundreds of thousands of jobs, utilizing automation and other new technologies. This includes not only closures in the near future in the brewing industry, but also layoffs at UPS, in the auto industry, in the post office, the technology sector and other industries.

In opposition to this globally coordinated offensive by the corporate elite, workers must organize their own counter-offensive, likewise coordinated on a global scale. This means not only unity with the Molson Coors workers, but workers across every industry.

All over the world, workers are building rank-and-file committees to fight back against joint management-union attacks. They are affiliated in a common organization, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. By forming their own committee as part of the IWA-RFC, Anheuser-Busch workers would be joining a global movement that would give them the unity which they need in order to counter AB Inbev, its Wall Street backers and its stooges in the Teamsters bureaucracy.

The WSWs stands ready to assist workers in building a committee. For more information, fill out the form below.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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