

# UAW delays release of vote tally after Caterpillar workers oppose sellout deal

By Marcus Day  
27 March 2017

Late Sunday night, the United Auto Workers, providing no reason for the delay, announced it would not release “certified” vote totals of its six-year contract proposal with Caterpillar until Monday, although it had previously assured workers the tally would be available within hours. The UAW had held ratification votes on its deal with Caterpillar, which covers some 5,000 workers in Illinois and Pennsylvania, throughout Sunday afternoon.

There was widespread opposition to the sellout agreement being pushed by the UAW and it is likely that rank-and-file workers voted it down. At the ratification meetings, angry workers confronted UAW bureaucrats and many wore “Vote NO” buttons or sported t-shirts saying, “If there’s no money to hide...There’s money to DIVIDE,” in a reference to an FBI investigation into Caterpillar’s stashing of billions in off-shore tax shelters.

Workers raised suspicions about the outcome of the vote throughout the day, with many expressing fears that even though the majority might vote it down, the UAW would find a way to make it pass. One worker in Peoria, Illinois noted conflicting instructions over balloting, saying, “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.”

Concerns about vote-rigging are well founded. In 2015, at both Ford and John Deere, workers accused the UAW of manipulating contract vote results, and were completely stonewalled by the union when they demanded recounts.

Rank-and-file workers are determined to oppose any further concessions, as indicated in February by a 93 percent vote to authorize a strike. The UAW has sought to run roughshod over this sentiment, coordinating an information blackout with the company during and after negotiations.

The UAW had announced it had reached a tentative agreement with Caterpillar just a little over a week ago, but only released its self-serving contract “highlights” last Thursday after facing demands from workers to see the full contract.

In Peoria, where the bulk of Caterpillar’s production is still located, supporters of the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* distributed hundreds of copies of a statement calling for a “no” vote to members of UAW Local 974 at the ratification meeting at the Peoria Civic Center. Workers expressed overwhelming opposition to the terms of the deal, along with hostility to the UAW for backing it and keeping its contents hidden.

Even with the limited information included in the union’s highlights, the contract was revealed to be an abject capitulation to Caterpillar’s drive to lower workers’ living standards.

The deal accepted the closure of the Aurora, Illinois plant, in which nearly 800 workers would lose their jobs, as an inevitability. It maintained the hated two-tier system, while “closing the gap” by once again freezing the wages of workers hired before 2005, who haven’t seen a base wage increase in years.

For younger workers hired after 2005, the deal included miserly two percent wage increases in 2018 and 2022, which would entail a de facto pay cut when inflation and rising health care costs are taken into account. In an additional effort to bamboozle younger workers, the deal also promised meaningless

“market-based” wage increases—which Caterpillar would be able to unilaterally determine—in other years.

The UAW sought to play on the financial desperation among workers by gilding the deal with a \$3,000 signing bonus and other lump sum payments. Many workers denounced such efforts to manipulate them into a “yes” vote. As one put it, “They can keep these piddling little incentives, we need an actual pay raise.”

Workers at Caterpillar have already suffered decades of relentless attacks on their jobs, wages, benefits and working conditions. Although CAT has raked in billions in profits over the last 10 years, the company has carried out wave after wave of plant closings and layoffs, cutting over 16,000 jobs—nearly 10 percent of its global workforce—in the space of just 15 months between 2015 and 2016. In every instance, Caterpillar has found a willing partner in the unions, whether it is the UAW, the International Association of Machinists, or the United Steelworkers.

As with the rebellion by autoworkers over sellout agreements pushed by the union in 2015, workers at Caterpillar took to social media in the run-up to the vote to denounce the UAW-backed deal and to share articles by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. One worker summed up the feelings of many when he shared the *Newsletter* statement calling for a “No” vote and wrote, “The [UAW] International sold us out before now they want to do it again.”

Workers in Peoria reported that the president of UAW Local 974, Randy Smith, had difficulty maintaining control of the Q&A, and seemed unable to rebut criticisms of the contract proposal.

Expressing indifference to the needs of the workers he claims to represent, Smith told the *Peoria Journal-Star* the union would “work on” pay differences between the tiers in future negotiations, adding contemptuously, “There’s some in the membership that thought 2 percent wasn’t enough.”

Workers reported that UAW “informational” meetings in Decatur and Aurora, Illinois, also offered no further details on the contract proposal beyond what was presented in the highlights.

“Nobody was happy about the contract, and there wasn’t a lot of love at the meeting,” Mike, a worker in Aurora, told the *Autoworker Newsletter*. “The UAW didn’t really talk about anything that we didn’t know. They gave no information on the dates the plant might

be closing. A lot of the stuff they were proposing, we don’t think we’re going to see it. Basically, with the contract, they were talking as if we already voted ‘Yes’ on it.”

A worker at Caterpillar’s plant in Decatur said, “Our president’s a young guy, so he got up there and sort of stammered through the points.” He added, “The International screwed us over. They gave up on us before negotiations even started.”

The fight is just beginning. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* urges workers to take matters out of the hands of the UAW, which is completely beholden to Caterpillar, Deere, and the Big Three auto companies, and to form rank-and-file factory committees without delay.

In order to achieve anything, workers at Caterpillar must break out of the isolation imposed by the union and make an urgent appeal to all the other workers—Illinois state workers, teachers, and workers at Deere and in the auto industry—to join them in a common fight for jobs, wages, pensions, health care and a decent living standard.

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>