

Build the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee! Unite with autoworkers in a counteroffensive to win what workers need!

Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee
10 February 2023

The following statement was issued by the recently formed Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The contract covering nearly 7,000 Caterpillar workers in the United Auto Workers union expires on March 1. To contact or discuss joining the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email cat.wrfc@gmail.com, or fill out the form at the end of the statement.

We, the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee, call on our brothers and sisters at Cat to begin organizing now, in every shop and facility, so that we are prepared to fight for and win major improvements in wages, benefits and working conditions.

We made loud and clear with our 98.6 percent strike authorization vote last month: The time when Cat management can treat us like slaves is over.

The struggle we face is about getting not just what workers want, but what we deserve. We've been losing every contract for decades. The tier system, the loss of pensions and company-paid health care, wage freezes and stagnation, less time off for leisure and to spend with our families: We have suffered all these injustices and more for far too long.

Our facilities are falling apart. The company has not maintained the buildings, the machinery, the equipment, anything. Management's disregard for safety, their relentless pursuit of profit and "shareholder value" above all else, has already resulted in the conditions which enabled the tragic and needless death of Steven Dierkes last year.

The 2017 UAW contract was nowhere near what we needed. The pitiful raises—for the workers who even got them—were more than eaten up by inflation, leaving many of us living paycheck to paycheck.

Meanwhile, the corrupt UAW executives and staff have gotten richer while we have gotten poorer. The head of

the UAW bargaining team in 2017, Vice President Norwood Jewell, went to prison for taking bribes from Fiat Chrysler. Ray Curry, the current president of the UAW, also was a top union "negotiator" of the 2017 agreement and signed off on it. From the 1990s to today, the UAW bureaucracy has again and again sold us out and allowed the company to mistreat and exploit us as they please.

The time has come to draw a line in the sand. Caterpillar has made nearly \$30 billion in operating profit just since 2019. The big shareholders are rewarded with billions in share buybacks and dividends every year. CEO Jim Umpleby received a \$24 million compensation package in 2021—nearly double what he received the year before—and other top Caterpillar executives make over \$7 million a year each.

The Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee puts forward the following concrete demands, which are based on what workers genuinely need and deserve:

- **A 50 percent wage increase for all workers**, to make up for years of stagnating or falling wages and the loss of profit-sharing. If wages had kept up with inflation over the past 30-40 years, let alone the substantial increases in productivity, workers would be making \$40-50 an hour.

- **COLA (regular cost-of-living raises)** in order to keep up with surging food, gas and housing prices.

- **The immediate abolition of the wage and benefit tier system**, with post-2005 pay and benefit cuts reversed.

- **A substantial increase in paid sick and vacation time off** for all workers.

- **A massive reduction in health care premiums and out-of-pocket costs** for both current workers and retirees.

- **The restoration of pensions** for all workers and their payment at a level adequate to provide a decent retirement.

No layoffs or plant closures!

Management, as well as UAW officials, will no doubt attempt to dismiss these demands as “unrealistic” and harmful to the company’s “competitiveness.” These pro-corporate arguments have been made time and again in an attempt to convince workers that the miserable conditions we face are necessary and can never change. But nothing significant won by workers—the eight-hour day, pensions, COLA—was ever given up by the corporations without a fight. What is or is not “realistic” and achievable will ultimately be determined in a struggle.

Moreover, hundreds of thousands of Big Three autoworkers and UPS workers face contract battles as well this year. A united struggle would immeasurably strengthen all of us.

In order for workers to be in the strongest possible position in this fight, we propose the following measures:

- No contract, no work. Without a ratified contract we will not return to work.

- Rank-and-file workers must have real oversight and control over all contract negotiations. All bargaining must be livestreamed, so that all members can watch and participate. The UAW’s “updates” on their contract talks in recent weeks have been as worthless as their “highlights” of past concession contracts.

- Full disclosure of all the terms of any proposed contract, and at least two weeks for the rank and file to review it before voting, or it’s an automatic “no” vote. Forcing a vote on “highlights” only will be an automatic rejection, and there will be no return to work until we have seen and ratified the full proposal.

- Workers must be given their full income from the UAW’s more-than \$800 million strike fund for the duration of any walkout. The strike fund was built with our dues money. It must be used to adequately provision a strike, and not feather the nests of the UAW bureaucrats. We cannot allow our strike to be starved out and isolated, as “Solidarity House” did to the CNH workers over the course of 2022, resulting ultimately in the imposition of a pro-company contract and a new tier in health care benefits last month.

We fully support the call made by Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and candidate for UAW president: power and control over decision-making must be in the hands of rank-and-file workers!

We are under no illusions: Caterpillar is a cutthroat opponent. Everyone knows that they have been preparing for a strike. But management is not all-powerful. If workers are united, organized, and have a worked-out

strategy, we are far more powerful.

We are part of a vast and internationally interconnected workforce, a source of immense strength to the extent that we leverage it. Caterpillar has dozens of manufacturing plants spread across North and South America, Asia and Europe. These workers are exploited and abused by the same company, and we must do everything we can to unite with them and coordinate our struggles.

Our fight is taking place within a broader movement against the impact of inflation and inequality. From Volvo Trucks and John Deere workers in 2021, to CNH and rail workers in 2022, to the millions of workers who have been striking and protesting in France and Britain in recent weeks against proposed pension cuts and attacks on workers’ right to strike, workers everywhere are looking for a way to fight back.

Fellow Caterpillar workers, we must look beyond the here-and-now and begin thinking long-term. The company, with the assistance of the corrupt UAW bureaucracy, has repeatedly divided us, pitting one generation of workers against the next in a day-to-day struggle to survive. This must end. We need a strategy which is based not just on what we need today or tomorrow, but what workers will need to live decent lives for years to come.

We appeal to the thousands of Caterpillar workers at factories and other facilities in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Texas, as well as in other states and around the world: Join the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee! We will only advance if we join our struggles together. Contact us today at cat.wrfc@gmail.com.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact