

Letter from a Caterpillar worker: “We are done messing around”

24 February 2023

With the March 1 contract expiration deadline for over 6,000 United Auto Workers members at Caterpillar fast approaching, workers are increasingly calling for a counter-offensive to win back major improvements in wages, benefits and working conditions.

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently received the following letter from a veteran Caterpillar worker in the Peoria, Illinois, region, where the company has produced tractors for more than a century. Some details of the letter have been changed to protect the worker’s anonymity. The worker explains how he was first employed for over a year as “supplemental,” a highly exploited temporary status that the UAW bureaucracy has allowed to become widespread at both Caterpillar and the auto industry.

To organize a fight back, workers have recently launched the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The committee is demanding a 50 percent pay increase to make up for lost income over the last two decades, cost-of-living raises to keep up with the skyrocketing inflation of the last two years, the ending of the two-tier system, vastly improved health care plans, the restoration of pensions, safe working conditions and more.

To discuss joining the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email cat.wrfc@gmail.com. To speak out on your experiences at Caterpillar or what you think workers should be fighting for, fill out the form below.

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I have worked for Caterpillar for over 15 years. The two-tier supplemental system was a kick in the balls. I started in the mid-2000s and remained supplemental for over a year before Caterpillar hired me full time. I spent a year with not a single benefit. My wife stayed home so I could work almost 60 hours, week in and week out, to afford things a new family needed with no insurance.

My first year I literally missed zero days and probably worked almost every weekend and Sunday trying to show my worth to them, and they abused this for over a year until I threatened to quit. They preach safety and family, but treat you like lower than dirt.

They threaten jobs. They threatened to move elsewhere and they promised a new headquarters [in Peoria] with child care and a gym, and then the new CEO Umpleby canceled it and went to Deerfield and now Texas.

This company doesn’t care about people unless you turn profits to maximize their upper pay scale, and then give you pennies on the dollar and play games on bonuses.

I’m getting worn down, and moving to another job elsewhere is not a option. But pay in this place for what they produce and what they make is very subpar to comparable workplaces in the area and tri-state region. Caterpillar is the great destroyer of hardworking people because they are selfish to the core.

Health insurance should be free for what we go through. 401k match should be double for what we provide in man hours and the profits we turn out for them.

I’ve been topped out for over 10 years with piss-poor little COLA raises that end up costing me more in tax liability than if I didn’t get a raise. I make now what they made in the 1990s, around \$26—so yeah, 30 years ago. It’s time they pay up what they owe all of us.

Two years working through COVID as “essential” and not a single bonus—nothing extra for being here for them. The federal government has millions in contracts

but has allowed this mistreatment for decades and it's time for it to end NOW!

I have never been the type to cause much ruckus, but that time is over. It's time for action. As far as the UAW goes, the last two contracts they were chickens**t and had their hands in Cat's pockets, as you've seen over the years of arrests and prison time.

It's time they deliver or else. This is our time. Time for the hardworking people in life to soar and take back the life they took from us. The time is now and I'm ready to strike if that's what it takes. We are done messing around.



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