

Vote NO on the UAW-Caterpillar concessions contract! Organize now to defeat the sellout and prepare a strike!

Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee
1 March 2023

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Brothers and sisters,

Shortly after midnight on March 1, the UAW announced a tentative agreement with Caterpillar. Even based on just the limited “highlights” of the contract which have been released, it is clear that this is yet another sellout by the UAW bureaucracy.

After withholding information from workers on the most important things being said in the contract talks, union officials are now trying to stampede us into voting on an agreement before the vast majority of workers have been able to read and study the full contract language, just as they did in 2017 and earlier.

We will not accept another concessionary contract rammed down our throats! The Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee calls on all workers to demand the full contract be distributed to all workers digitally, not just “highlights” that conceal the worst things we’d lose, and at least an additional week for workers to study and discuss it. Any deal which they try to rush us into with only partial information should be rejected on principle.

Our brothers and sisters at John Deere demanded the release of the full contract after the UAW first announced a TA there in 2021, which the union heads reluctantly agreed to. When workers were able to read the full terms of the contract, they were outraged at what it contained, and voted down the proposal by a massive 90 percent.

What is already known about the terms of the UAW-Caterpillar deal indicates that it is another slap in the face and deserving of an overwhelming rejection.

According to the UAW’s “highlights,” the six-year contract proposal would contain wage increases totaling just 19 percent, an average of just over 3 percent a year. The

wage increases would be distributed as follows: 7 percent at ratification and 4 percent raises for three other years, with only lump sum payments in the other years, which do not increase base wages.

Consider the following: Annual inflation in January was 6.4 percent, and at times last year it was above 9 percent. **In other words, if inflation remains at its current rate, it will total 39 percent over the next six years, far more than the wage increases being offered!** Workers would be left with even less buying power than before the contract. And this does not even account for the years of pay freezes or below-inflation raises we have already suffered.

If these are the “highlights,” how much worse are the “lowlights”?

The UAW has stated that health care premium increases will be capped at 2 percent annually. But workers are already burdened with monthly premiums totaling hundreds of dollars a month for family or spousal coverage. As recently as 2005, the company paid all of workers’ health care premiums!

To try to sugarcoat the inadequate wage increases, management and UAW officials are dangling a \$6,000 signing bonus. But experienced workers know: the bigger the signing bonus, the bigger sellout overall. There are also marginal increases to paid time off, but they remain inadequate to provide workers the time needed to spend with their families.

The details of the deal released so far confirm the warning we made in our statement on Monday: “Closed-door, backroom talks between management and UAW officials will only produce the same result as each time before: a contract which would boost Cat’s profits and utterly fail to meet what workers need and deserve.”

Fellow workers: The time has come to take a stand. Caterpillar workers have been losing in contract after contract for decades. We were among the first UAW members to be subjected to the degrading tier system, which

has now been in place for nearly 20 years.

Some of the corrupt UAW bureaucrats who “negotiated” these deals, including former UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell (who oversaw the 2017 Cat contract), went to prison for accepting bribes from auto company executives. But while some of the most crooked UAW officers may have briefly gone to jail, workers have not been made whole for everything which was illegitimately given away to the companies.

We again state the demands of our committee, which we say are the minimum needed to provide workers a decent standard of living:

- **A 50 percent wage increase for all workers, to make up for years of frozen or falling wages and the loss of profit-sharing and bonuses.** 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. Promises for “market-based” raises, determined at management’s whim, are meaningless and no guarantee against inflation.

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

- **The payment of overtime at double the regular rate** for any hours worked over eight hours during the weekday or work on the weekend.

- **At least two weeks of paid personal time for all workers.** 50 hours remains inadequate. COVID and other infectious diseases continue to circulate, impacting workers and their families most heavily.

- **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.

- **A two-year, not six-year, contract.** A six-year contract would seek to handcuff us in the event of rapid economic changes, such as a further surge in inflation, which can be devastating to workers.

We also restate the plan of action necessary to prevail in this struggle:

- **Workers should begin immediately making preparations for strike action.** We have already made loud and clear that we are ready to act and fight for what we need with our 98.6 percent strike authorization vote last month.

We appeal to all sections of Caterpillar workers to join and support our fight, including Cat workers at USW or non-union plants; rank-and-file white collar workers; workers at Caterpillar’s parts suppliers; and Cat workers in other countries. We welcome the expressions of solidarity from

white collar workers, and we will not accept any attempt by the company to retaliate against workers who refuse to cross the picket line in support of a strike.

- **Rank-and-file workers must have real oversight and control over all contract negotiations.** No more closed-door “negotiations” between Cat and UAW executives! All bargaining must be livestreamed and conducted in the open, so that all members can watch and participate. Workers have a right to this information.

- **Workers must be given their full income from the UAW’s more than \$800 million strike fund for the duration of any walkout.** The recent increase in strike pay to \$500 a week remains completely insufficient.

Brothers and sisters, nothing has ever been won by workers—whether the eight-hour day, pensions, COLA, health care for retirees, and other gains—without hard and determined struggle. We know Caterpillar is a ruthless opponent, one that does not even treat workers as human beings.

But management is not all powerful. Caterpillar workers are part of a vast and globally interconnected network of production. Workers everywhere are looking for a way to fight back against inflation and sweatshop working conditions, and Cat workers in Northern Ireland and France have both carried out strikes in the past year.

Moreover, over 170,000 autoworkers at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis (Chrysler) in both the US and Canada are facing major contract fights this year, as well as hundreds of thousands of UPS workers. All these workers have suffered under tier systems which are despised. More and more workers see the need for a united struggle.

If you agree with the demands of our committee and our perspective, whether you’re a UAW member at Cat, a member of another union, a non-union or white-collar worker, or a parts worker, we ask you: Share our statement with your coworkers. Organize meetings of rank-and-file workers at your workplaces or on social media to discuss the tentative agreement and what demands workers really need. And contact our committee to discuss joining it, building it and preparing a counteroffensive by workers: cat.wrfc@gmail.com.



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