UAW tells Caterpillar workers it will not distribute full contract at informational meetings: “It was a propaganda show mixed with passive-aggressive bullying”

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With the ratification vote on the tentative agreement reached between the United Auto Workers and Caterpillar rapidly approaching this weekend, the workers are being stonewalled by the UAW bureaucracy at so-called “informational meetings” this week to discuss the UAW-backed contract proposal.

The UAW announced voting for the proposed contract would be held on Saturday and Sunday for workers at Peoria and Decatur, Illinois. Workers in Decatur have been split up into multiple meetings from Monday to Friday this week before they vote on Saturday and Sunday, preventing workers from voicing their concerns en masse.

Workers in Peoria have had their informational meetings and voting times scheduled for the weekend, with virtually no time to discuss even the limited “highlights” that have been handed to workers.

Caterpillar workers who attended meetings in Decatur Tuesday reported that local UAW officials are refusing to distribute the full contract, claiming that it would be “leaked” online. UAW officials told workers there was a copy of the full contract, which is over a hundred pages, at the union hall for individual workers to read, but that it would not be released digitally.

In response, workers are demanding to know what the company and the union leadership have to hide as the information meetings consist of evasions and threats when workers ask questions.

“Today’s meeting in Decatur was strictly a propaganda show, mixed with passive-aggressive bullying, while the UAW local leadership tried selling a subpar contract to hard-working people,” a worker told the *World Socialist Web Site.*

“It was basically a buy, buy, buy, or else session. They were telling people if this doesn’t get voted in, they will move the factory. Or they said vote for this, or you won’t get that sign-on money!”

The UAW bureaucracy has routinely held a gun to the head of workers saying they must accept concessions in order to “save jobs.” But long experience has shown that promises of plant closing moratoriums are essentially worthless and concessions have never saved jobs.

Most recently, Stellantis announced it would indefinitely idle its assembly plant in Belvidere, Illinois even though the 2019 contract included a so-called plant closing moratorium. The fight to defend jobs and prevent plant closures are bound up with the fight for a higher wage and other improvements.

Additionally, rank-and-file Caterpillar workers who asked for more details about the full agreement beyond just the “highlights” were repeatedly brushed aside.

Another Decatur worker confirmed how union officials dodged questions and gave out as little information as possible. “They’re using appeals to incrementalism and ‘take it or leave it’ language to coerce workers into accepting a bad deal. They sped through the last two pages of the ‘highlights’ and stopped taking questions.

“They also used passive language in talking about the contract. They basically implied ‘we aren’t proud of this contract, but it’s the best we could do for now.’ They even said that ‘we couldn’t get everything we wanted. If we pass this contract now, we can try to get

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more on the next one, and the one after that.' As if negotiations are every six months and not every six years!"

A veteran worker from Peoria added, "They've said this at every contract of my 28 years there. My patience is wearing thin."

In response to the information blackout by the UAW bureaucracy, the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File committee released a statement today, "Show us the full Caterpillar-UAW contract! Workers have a right to know what's in the agreement!"

The committee statement makes the following demands for the immediate distribution of the full contract:

• The entire proposed contract, including all additions and deletions and any "letters of agreement," must be posted online and made accessible to all workers.

• We must have one additional week to study and discuss this lengthy and complex document before voting on it.

• Mass meetings of the entire locals must be organized, so that workers can benefit from the largest possible discussion and critical questioning of the agreement, and ensure the needs of all workers are met. We have the right to have our questions answered on every detail, line and punctuation mark in this contract.

• If these demands are not met, Cat workers should reject this deal as a matter of principle. It's not just our interests on the line—this contract will affect our families, retirees, the next generation, as well as workers at other companies.

The "highlights" that have been released by Caterpillar and the UAW so far consist of a few pages at most and they include major concessions and attacks on workers' real wages. These include a 19 percent wage increase over six years, which amounts to a 20 percent pay cut if the current rate of inflation persists, along with higher healthcare premiums for workers and retirees.

Given that these are the "highlights" workers are rightly suspicious that the full contract will have many "lowlights" and further attacks concealed in the lawyer's speak of such contracts.

During the John Deere workers' strike, the UAW leadership released a significant portion of the full contract after workers demanded to study it. When Deere workers had the opportunity to study the contract in full, they voted to reject the agreement by over 90 percent.

In opposing the current proposed contract "highlights," the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee continues to reiterate its strategy and demands including: a 50 percent wage increase for all workers to make up for decades of lost pay and rising inflation, COLA, the ending of the two-tier system with an immediate reversal of post-2005 pay freezes, improved healthcare, the restoration of pension and a two-year contract in the anticipation of major economic shifts.

Caterpillar workers have every right to demand this and more, with the company making over $18 billion in profits in 2022 alone and billions handed to shareholders off the backs of the labor of Cat workers. The cost of living crisis is propelling millions of workers into struggle all over the world as they find they cannot afford the soaring price of groceries, rents, electricity and more.

In mounting such a fight, Caterpillar workers in the UAW have many allies, including in the non-union plants and internationally, as well as auto and auto parts workers, UPS workers, rail workers, teachers and other sections of the working class who are gearing up for their own contract battles this year.

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