

Caterpillar workers: Fight back against attacks on paid absence time, sick days and more! Build rank-and-file power!

Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee
27 April 2023

To sign up for text updates or discuss joining the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee, text CAT to (866) 847-1086. Work at Caterpillar? Fill out the form below to tell us what you think about the contract, workplace conditions or if you'd like to get involved.

Brothers and Sisters,

It's been more than a month since the UAW bureaucracy imposed a sellout contract on nearly 7,000 Caterpillar workers, despite widespread opposition to the deal.

Since then, rank-and-file workers have faced a number of serious problems that confirm the warnings about the deal previously made by the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee:

No access to the full contract: A month later, we still do not have access to the contract brought back by the UAW bureaucracy. While our local UAW bureaucrats are busy campaigning for positions in the local elections, they cannot be bothered to give us our full contract.

This is the digital age, and there is no excuse for us to not have a PDF of the full contract made available to the entire membership so we can refer to our rights and learn the "lowlights" that we never got to study before we voted on it.

Sign-on bonus sham: We've heard that workers who have worked less than six months would not get their \$6,000 sign-on bonus. This was a dirty trick used by the company and the union officials to get the newer workers to sign the contract. They never told us this in their "highlights" before the vote.

• **Paid absence allowance (PAA) time challenged:** Since the contract was pushed through, workers in Decatur and East Peoria have been told by supervisors that the company is requiring a "compelling reason" to get our paid time off if we called in 30 minutes before work, or it would be an unapproved absence. We know this violates our rights and we do not need to give supervisors or HR any reason to use our PAA time.

• **Doctor's notes threatened:** Workers in East Peoria have heard supervisors stating that they want to take away our six doctor's notes which allow us to call in sick. They are trying to limit us using our sick days and force us to use our paid personal days.

• **Increased demands for output at East Peoria:** They are pushing hard for more machine hours and they're forcing us to come on weekends as they are having a hard time hiring.

• **Higher quotas in Decatur:** At one of the buildings in Decatur, the vice president came to the floor and demanded that we increase our machine output by 11 percent.

We also learned that in East Peoria the company was not adequately

prepared for the possibility of a strike, and we were in a very strong position to fight back against the company:

• **Stockpile shortage:** According to the schedulers we talked to, the company had only stockpiled enough for at most 2-3 months. Some departments are still behind. They are still filling orders for 2022. If we went on strike, and they used scabs, they still would not have been able to run at capacity for all three shifts in the various East Peoria buildings and we would have really hurt the company!

• **Machines breaking down:** Much of the equipment and machines in the plant have been left in a state of disrepair by management over many years. The company would have been in serious trouble if we went on strike and they didn't have us to operate these machines.

And just on Thursday, the company announced that its 2023 first-quarter profits rose a massive 31 percent from the previous year, from \$1.5 billion to nearly \$2 billion.

All these facts show that rank-and-file Caterpillar workers were sold out by the UAW apparatus even though we were in a very powerful position to mount a serious struggle against the company.

How did this happen? Let's review the experience we have passed through and how we can fight back.

On March 12, the UAW declared a six-year contract agreement with Caterpillar covering 7,000 workers had passed despite widespread opposition to the deal. The rank and file were only given "highlights" by the company and the union bureaucrats, who refused to give workers digital access to the full contract ahead of time.

Even with those limited details we were given, it was clear to us that the agreement would be a massive assault on our wages and our living standards. The highlights of the contract included a 19 percent wage increase over six years. By our calculations the contract would in fact be closer to a 20-26 percent cut in real wages, taking into account the high levels of inflation over the past two years hovering between 6 and 9 percent.

That does not make up for all the concessions imposed on us by the UAW bureaucracy since the sellout of the strikes in the 1990s. As with John Deere, the UAW created a two-tier system and froze wages for the top tier for over two decades, while giving marginal raises to the second tier workers below the rate of inflation. We also lost our pension and COLA while being burdened with massive health care costs.

For months, we were given no real communication as to the content of the contract talks between the company and the UAW. After we voted to authorize a strike by 99 percent, the UAW then announced an agreement just minutes after the contract expired on March 1.

At local meetings held in Decatur and East Peoria before the vote, UAW officials tried to intimidate and browbeat us and said they would not release the full contract in a digital format for every member to study the details. Union officials gave excuses and spoke condescendingly to us, told us this was the best contract we would get and that if we voted it down, we would not get the sign-on bonus, or that we would end up on strike for nine months to a year.

The UAW's actions and threats were completely anti-democratic and had the effect of intimidating many workers into voting for the agreement. In our view, the contract is the illegitimate product of a process that was designed to keep us in the dark and uninformed, and to coerce us into a deal the company wanted.

Before the contract expired, however, we formed the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee, part of a network of workers in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. We knew we had to take the initiative out of the hands of the pro-company UAW bureaucracy and fight to bring power back to the rank and file in the contract process, and fight for our needs on the shop floor.

The committee fought for what we as rank-and-file Caterpillar workers needed, not what the company or the union apparatus said was acceptable. Our top demand was for a 50 percent pay increase to make up for decades of stagnating wages, loss of profit sharing and COLA. We should be making \$40-50 an hour today if our wages had kept up with inflation and productivity levels! For a company that has made over \$30 billion in profits since 2019 alone, this was completely realistic to fight for.

We also demanded a restoration of COLA, ending the tier system, a major increase in sick time and personal time off, the restoration of pensions, and a significant reduction in our health care costs. We appealed to our brothers and sisters throughout the UAW to mobilize along with us, and we won support from Caterpillar white-collar workers and non-UAW workers in Indiana and Wisconsin.

Our demands won a hearing among thousands of Caterpillar workers, who have had to work in plants in East Peoria, Decatur and across the country that are unsafe and falling apart. Caterpillar's ruthless drive for profits at our expense came at the cost of the life of our brother Steven Dierkes, who was incinerated in the Mapleton foundry. Steven's needless death was just the tip of the iceberg of a pattern of unsafe conditions at Caterpillar going back decades.

The committee warned that any contract brought back by the UAW bureaucracy, led by then-President Ray Curry, UAW Vice President Chuck Browning and the rest of the Region 4 leaders, would be done behind our backs and ensure terms friendly to the company and against the rank and file.

In opposition to the UAW apparatus, our committee worked to inform, educate and organize the rank-and-file Caterpillar UAW members. We fought against the information blackout by the UAW throughout the process. We called for a "No" vote to organize and defeat the sellout agreement and prepare for a strike.

Our warnings about the sellout agreement have come to pass within just a month since the contract "passed." Now we must turn to our fight ahead.

All the conditions we face today at Caterpillar plants in East Peoria, Mapleton, Morton, Decatur, Pontiac and York are the outcome of the UAW bureaucracy's sellout. We must fight back with a real strategy to build rank-and-file power on the shop floor.

Our immediate demands include:

Full access to the contract now! We need to study the details and expose any attacks on our rights contained in it. We have no idea

what's actually contained in it.

No reasons needed for use of PAA/Blue Card time and no limits on our doctor's notes! We will not accept any attacks on paid personal time and our sick days.

No increase in output! We are not going to increase the company's profits so they can exploit us even more.

Give everyone their \$6,000 sign-on bonus! No strings attached!

We have many allies among workers in other rank-and-file committees in the auto industry and other workplaces in the United States and internationally. We must mobilize the full force of our strength by linking up the rank-and-file committees recently formed among Dana Toledo auto parts workers, Ford Chicago Assembly, GM Flint Assembly and Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly.

We also strongly endorse the statement by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees to "Mobilize all autoworkers to fight plant closures and mass layoffs! Defend the right to every job!" along with the 2023 International May Day Rally.

Our brothers and sisters at Stellantis, GM and Ford face a major battle ahead, including a fight against job cuts and plant closures, such as the recently idled Stellantis Jeep plant in Belvidere, Illinois. We must link up with over 140,000 GM, Ford and Stellantis workers in the US and 20,000 workers in Canada, along with 340,000 UPS workers whose contract expires in July.

Fellow workers, we appeal to you to join the Caterpillar Workers Rank-and-File Committee, in opposition to the UAW bureaucracy that conspires against us with management. Join the fight for a rank-and-file movement for workers' power in all our buildings and workplaces. We appeal to our Caterpillar brothers and sisters in non-union plants in the US and internationally to join us as well. We have to grow the committee to fight the daily injustices we face along with our strategic, long-term interests.

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