

As details of new tentative agreement emerge

Workers oppose UAW-Nexteer divide-and-conquer tactics

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The United Auto Workers finally released the full language of its second tentative agreement with Nexteer late on Friday, three days after it shut down a strike by 3,350 workers at the complex in Saginaw, Michigan. The UAW is attempting to ram through the contract, which maintains poverty level wages for the auto parts workers, with votes scheduled in less than one week.

The UAW called the strike that began at 12:01 on Tuesday morning after Nexteer workers overwhelmingly shot down the previous UAW-Nexteer agreement by 97.5 percent. The UAW sought to use the strike as a maneuver to let off steam, ending it less than one day after it began, without giving workers a chance to vote on whether to go back to work or to see the agreement that the UAW claimed it had reached with the company.

For the past several days, UAW executives have been meeting behind closed doors to finalize the agreement, draw up “highlights” aimed at presenting the new deal in the best possible light and develop a strategy of dividing workers in an attempt to secure a “yes” vote.

The UAW is claiming that it has “won” many gains in the new tentative agreement, however, most of what it cites in its “highlighter” were either in the old contract or in the tentative agreement workers rejected. Workers care more about what is not in the agreement: an end to the multi-tiered system, an end to the alternative work schedule and, most importantly, an above-poverty wage.

Wage levels are broken down by several different classifications of workers, most of which will see increases at below the rate of inflation. Senior semi-skilled (“D Bucket”) workers, for example, will see

wages increase just 2.5 percent over the life of the contract, with no raises after the minuscule increase at ratification. Taking into account inflation, a \$21.37 wage (the max-out under the new TA) at the end of the contract in 2020 is equivalent to \$19 today, meaning these workers will receive a drop in their hourly rate.

Another section of workers, so-called specialized (“A and B Bucket”) workers, will max out at \$19.56 an hour, a \$2.50 increase over the four-and-a-half year duration of the contract.

The lowest-waged production workers, who make only \$12 an hour now, will see their hourly rate increase to \$14 an hour at ratification, but this will increase to only \$15.88 by the end of the contract. The contract that workers overwhelmingly rejected had a max rate for new workers of \$15.85 (over four years rather than four and a half).

The UAW and Nexteer are counting on tricking less experienced production workers into voting “yes” by dangling a \$2,000 signing bonus, which will be cut substantially after taxes and union dues.

“The UAW and the company are trying to divide us,” said one younger Nexteer worker who will be voting “no” on the new deal.

In reality, the max-out of \$15.88 for less senior workers in 2020 is equivalent in real terms to just \$14—meaning they will see no real wage increase after ratification. For production workers currently making above \$12.48, wages will effectively stay stagnant, rising by less than \$2 over the course of the agreement.

“A lot of us aren’t happy with the new deal,” a senior Nexteer worker told the WSWW *Autoworker Newsletter*. “Basically it’s the contract we’re under now with a few minor things changed. Supposedly

managers can now change the work schedule and call you up at 3 a.m. if they need parts out. They can change your hours and days of work and they're not getting rid of the tiers."

Workers took to Facebook to denounce the deal: "Not a big difference," said another worker. "Probably had this one all ready and gave us the crap one first so we'd think we were getting a good deal."

"It sucks being here for 5 years and making the same money as new hires," a third worker wrote.

The senior Nexteer worker who spoke to the WSWS said the workers need to educate those who might be tricked into voting "yes" by the phony highlights.

"First, they shouldn't force us to vote next week," he said. "We should have time to read over the contract ourselves, that way we could break down all the language that they try to hide. We need to get together and have our own meeting to go over the contract."

The attempt to prey on younger workers' lack of experience is coupled by UAW-corporate threats and intimidation. This week, many workers who had not obtained their 90-day protections were fired on the bogus grounds that they had "unsatisfactory work performance."

The firings are an attempt to scare workers into accepting the second sellout agreement. It is unclear whether the fired workers have been reinstated. UAW Local 699 President Rick Burzynski told the *Autoworker Newsletter* that "we have taken down everyone's names" but claimed "at this point there is no way to prove that it was related to the strike or not."

Burzynski also claimed that only two or three workers had been fired. Upon hearing this, another Nexteer worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "That's a lie. I heard one guy say the UAW told him he was fired for posting something bad about the union on social media. The UAW had the last contract negotiated so the company could walk out whoever they want before 90 days.

"They thought all these new hires were going to go along with the new contract and none of them did, so they just fired people. Why would a worker pay dues if they can get fired before 90 days? Besides, you can't fire someone for striking. That's freedom of speech—they can't tell you what you can and cannot say."

The senior worker said that if Nexteer workers

organized themselves to defeat the new sellout deal on the basis of a united fight against the UAW-corporate alliance, workers across the world would pay close attention and follow their lead.

"There are millions and millions of people in this world who are basically working for nothing. The companies are getting rid of retirement plans and we're working to make them richer."



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