Letter from Indiana autoworker to Nexteer workers: Contract is a bad deal for skilled trades

Our reporter
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The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter received the following letter from a skilled trades worker at a Big Three auto plant in Indiana. The Indiana autoworker is following the struggle of 3,350 Nexteer workers in Saginaw, Michigan who voted on December 6 to reject the first deal pushed by the UAW by 97.5 percent.

The UAW called a phony one-day strike on December 8 and shut it down before workers had a chance to see, let alone vote, on the reported deal. The full contract was not released until December 11. Voting on the deal is scheduled for this Thursday and Friday, and the UAW and the corporation are pulling out all the stops to ram the contract through. Up to 30 workers have reportedly been fired in a move to intimidate workers.

The Indiana autoworker's letter specifically addresses the skilled trades section of the Nexteer-UAW tentative agreement.

Nexteer workers,

It looks like on page 8 [of the Nexteer agreement (Article XIV, Section 2)], the sub-contracting of that skilled trades work which has nothing related to directly supporting production processes is what is discussed. Anything to do with building maintenance, building HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems, seems to be no longer the provenence of Nexteer skilled trades employees.

The section that deals with maintaining employee break areas or restrooms by a team of Nexteer skilled EE's (employees) seems to be a small bone tossed the way toward their Bargaining Unit (BU). That way the union is able to maintain the appearance of fighting to retain work, for the time being, which the company intends to eventually outsource in future agreements. Other work which is contemplated for outsourcing by the company may be of such a specialized nature that requires equipment not possessed by the company on site or may require technical competence outside the usual range of knowledge possessed by a particular Trade within the BU.

Our Big Three national agreement contains similar broad provisions which allow the corporation to outsource specialized work or work of such a large scope that the current population of skilled workers within our BU would be unable to do without extensive additional training or the purchase/rental of specialized equipment.

There are examples of this at my plant, where all the work was completed by outside contractors, start to finish. In the good old days, the work may have been done by our BU millwrights. Now it's done by a few dozen skilled workers not employed by the company.

The whole idea around outsourcing is not neccessarily to do the work cheaper than BU union labor costs. The company is loathe to add any more heads to their workforce covered by the national agreement. More employees mean more mouths for the corporation to feed, especially if these additional mouths to feed are laid off or otherwise not fully utilized to support production. More EE's means more sets of benefits to pay for and administer. More EE's means more bodies to find work for and to keep busy in a profitable way for the business. More EE's means another retiree to pension and keep healthy after they cease usefulness to the corporation.

The union serves to facilitate this directive by the company to minimize head count while maintaining the illusion that it is a body that represents the interests of

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its dues-paying membership, all within the auspices of a collective bargaining agreement that is in all probability written by management contract lawyers and not by our bargainers.

Hope this helps.

Regards,

An Indiana autoworker

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