

“Everyone’s eyes are opening up now that they are reading the contract”

Nexteer workers express anger and opposition to new contract deal

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As Nexteer workers review the details of the new tentative agreement negotiated by the United Auto Workers, anger and opposition is growing. Some 3,300 workers are employed at the former General Motors steering systems complex located in Saginaw, Michigan, about 100 miles north of Detroit.

Contract information meetings are set to begin on Tuesday with the contract vote scheduled for Thursday and Friday. The full contract has been posted on the United Auto Workers Local 699 web site and is being widely downloaded and studied.

The new vote follows a massive 97.5 percent rejection vote on the previous tentative deal negotiated by the UAW. That agreement provided wage increases below the rate of inflation, higher insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs, and a host of other concessions.

While the new tentative contract provides a slightly larger signing bonus and a bigger pay increase for Tier B workers, it contains a long list of takeaways that offset these paltry gains. Contract language spells out a management dictatorship on the shop floor, opening the way to victimizations for myriad petty offenses.

Workers are saddled with higher deductibles on health insurance, while the company’s share of co-insurance is decreased from 90 percent to 80 percent. The out-of-pocket maximum for a family is a crushing \$13,700, and is \$6,850 for single workers.

The UAW is touting the new agreement as a major improvement, obviously hoping that workers don’t take the time to study it. At the same time, the UAW is issuing threats that a contract rejection will lead to the

appointment of an arbitrator who will impose even worse contract terms.

UAW Local 699 President Rick Burzynski told the *Detroit News* Monday, “We pretty much addressed everything that our workers wanted. I think for the most part our members are satisfied, but it’s all going to come to the vote.”

Many Nexteer workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site* said they disputed that claim. A young Tier B worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “There is a feeling of frustration and betrayal. All we are asking for are decent wages and benefits and clear contract language where they can’t toy around with our lives.

“They are taking away your rights. Everyone’s eyes are opening up now that they are reading the contract. There are no checks and balances on anything. The company can fire you without recourse. I make \$12 an hour and even though they are raising us to \$14, a lot of us are voting ‘no.’”

He said the UAW was growing increasingly concerned about the criticisms of the contract appearing on Facebook, including those posted by the WSWS. “Some of the bargaining committee, who usually don’t say anything, have gotten on Facebook. That tells me they are nervous. Your articles have been right on the spot.”

Another younger Nexteer worker said, “They haven’t changed a whole lot. A lot of people don’t see it, but they are taking from here and there. They are just moving things around. Our co-pays and deductibles are going up. With our costs out of pocket being so big, the

wage increases don't make up for it."

Another big point of opposition is the language maintaining the Alternative Work Schedule and forced overtime. The contract permits the company to force workers to work whatever shift it pleases with 14 day's notice. If it puts a plant on "critical" status it can mandate 10-hour shifts on weekdays and eight hours on weekends.

"They can force permanent people to work any shift they want," the worker said, "It will eliminate a lot of the overtime pay that people are used to. They also added to the contract that when your plant goes on 'critical' they can force you to work five 10-hour days. It only used to be nine hours."

This second sellout contract follows the decision by the UAW to call off a strike December 8 after just 20 hours. The strike cut off the supply of critical steering components for General Motors and Fiat Chrysler assembly plants, forcing the cancellation of shifts. Despite, or rather because of, the fact that the walkout was having such a powerful impact the UAW moved quickly to squelch it.

The young worker said the intervention of the UAW to end the walkout angered him. "I think we should still be out until we vote on a contract. General Motors was already hurting after just 20 hours."

He said the wage increases contained in the new tentative agreement were insubstantial. "Fourteen dollars an hour is not very much. Not every worker lives in Saginaw. They come from all over. When gas prices were up no one was making any money. If you don't have a spouse or significant other also working, you can't make it. The prices of vehicles are going up, but three-quarters of the workers at Nexteer can't afford to buy the vehicle we make."

A worker with five years at Nexteer said, "We got a little raise and a couple of other things that aren't big, but they got what they wanted. Most of the contract is geared toward Nexteer.

"The thing that blows me away is those who were hired in 2010 are being labeled 'new hires' and will be paid \$14 an hour, instead of \$15.85.

"Someone who has been here five years should be making the same as those they are working next to."

She said the contract language would make it easier to suspend or fire workers. "They are always trying to find ways to get you out. You always have a target on

your back. If you are in the bathroom too long they can write you up and walk you out. They want to create a climate of fear. They are very intimidating."

She said she was angry at the role of the UAW in bringing both the initial and revised contracts back to workers. "I think the UAW has a vested interest in General Motors," she said, referring to the union's ownership of stock in the company through the retiree health care trust fund. "If GM stock was down they wouldn't be making money."



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