

Nexteer workers denounce UAW after ratification of sellout deal

Our reporters

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Workers at the Nexteer Automotive complex in Saginaw, Michigan denounced the United Auto Workers on Monday after the UAW pushed through a new five-year labor agreement past opposition from rank-and-file workers.

Workers were particularly incensed that Local 699 had not released the full contract as voting began on December 17 and reportedly was still signing side deals with management, known as Memorandums of Understanding (MOU), that workers had no chance to approve or reject.

The 3,300 workers at the former General Motors steering component complex defeated the original UAW-backed tentative agreement by a resounding 97.5 percent vote on December 6. The UAW International and Local 699 responded first by calling a bogus 20-hour strike to corral opposition and then mounting a week-long campaign of intimidation and manipulation to push a repackaged deal through. The UAW said the second deal was passed by 61-39 percent.

The new agreement does not restore the massive concessions imposed in 2010, when GM sold the facility to China-based Pacific Century Motors amid threats by the UAW that the plant would close if workers rejected a second GM-UAW ultimatum. The new contract imposes high out-of-pocket health care costs on workers who will make between \$15-17.77 by the end of the deal. It also gives management the green light to victimize workers on the flimsiest grounds.

A worker with four years at Nexteer said, “A lot of people are pissed off. It got voted in because they put out the threat to close the doors. There are too many people who are too far in debt, and there were too many temps who they hired just before the vote.

“It was both the union and the company. The union told us this was the best we could get. ‘If you don’t

vote for this you may get nothing.’ On top of that a lot of people were afraid of losing holiday pay over Christmas.”

He said that he was afraid that with the increased management powers contained in the new agreement there would be victimizations. “They are going to start moving people out, firing them for little things. If you put something negative up on Facebook you can get fired.

“I think the whole thing is illegal. Especially the way they called us out on strike for one day then sent us back without even seeing the contract. We have no representation from the union. I think they are right in bed with the company. They are the company really. They only pretend to be different.”

He said that those earning tier-two pay find it hard to live. “My wife is on disability and I am working seven days a week to get by. Most people there do not have a home life. They have to work all the time.

“If you had a family, just one person working, you would have to live under someone else’s roof. You could not make a house and a car payment.

“At the end of five years we will be up to \$16 an hour and the workers at McDonald’s will be getting the same.

“The company doesn’t care about people. The big shots want to control everything. They want to keep wages down to keep profits high. We are making them rich and getting nothing in return.”

He said that in addition to tier-two workers and temporary workers, Nexteer employed contract workers making as little as \$8 an hour. “They check the parts to make sure the parts meet specifications. We are afraid they will be hiring a bunch more and eventually they won’t need us.

“I talked to one guy who works for OmniSource [a

temp agency]. He has to work three to four jobs in order to survive.”

Another lower-paid worker said, “There are a lot of upset people. We don’t know what’s in it. As far as I know they are still working on it [the contract].

“Nexteer does what it wants to do, and the union lets them get away with it. Every year they vote themselves a raise. The UAW is all about money, money, money. There is nothing about solidarity. We are the ones breaking our backs and they are making all the money.”

Another production worker said, “It was the union, both the International and local, more than the company that pushed this contract through. Inside the plant, union officials were bad-mouthing workers and even some local committeemen who opposed the contract.

“In order to get more votes they promised that apprentices would get more than current skilled workers. The local president came into the plant the day before the vote and some trades guys were letting him have it about this. He starting yelling and cursing at them, saying if they had anything more to say they should come down to the bar to fight him.

“Seven hundred workers didn’t vote this time. Almost everybody did the first time. People were just pissed off and didn’t think the UAW would bring back anything better even if they voted it down again.

“It’s illegal to have you vote on something they were changing while the vote was going on. You can’t just change stuff after the fact. There were too many technicalities and irregularities for people to believe this process was legit.

“In the new contract if you go on sick leave, or you get in a car accident and in the hospital, you get a point towards being disciplined and that could be a matter of losing your job. Any raise we got was lost due to increased insurance and the fact that they took away deferred holidays that went towards time-and-a-half overtime rates. On the PPO [health care] the company pays 60 percent and we pay 40 percent, for the HMO it’s a 80-20 split.

“The UAW realizes that it’s signing contracts that lead to even more job losses. That’s why they have stock in GM to keep the income coming. They act like middlemen and cheap labor contractors. It’s not good, and they want to keep getting rid of jobs and make people suffer so that we will be willing to work for anything.

“Everyday in the plant we see management make decisions to send out bad parts. It never affects them, only us. They keep getting their big bonuses but it comes out of our production money. The people in America are getting fed up. We should shut everything down and hurt Wall Street and the big peoples’ money.”



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