

UAW continues to stall, while Tenneco auto parts workers call for strike

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Work at Tenneco? Fill out the form at the bottom of this article to tell us what conditions are like at the plant, and what you think workers should be fighting for. All comments will be kept anonymous.

Nearly 300 Tenneco auto parts workers at the Greenville, Michigan plant have been working without a new contract since the start of the pandemic in 2020. The United Auto Workers told workers that the current contract had to be extended in order to protect the company.

While workers were asked to continue working under a contract which was already concessionary to begin with, Tenneco continued to profit. At the end of 2021 Tenneco Inc. had \$4.7 million in revenue from sales and \$134 million in pretax income.

Originally founded as a natural gas company, Tenneco Inc. is the product of a winding series of mergers and spinoffs, like many parts companies. In 2018, Tenneco completed its acquisition of Federal-Mogul, a leading world supplier of original and aftermarket powertrain parts. This year, investment firm Apollo Global Management acquired Tenneco for \$7.1 billion. Apollo, seeking to profit off of this new deal, is relying on the UAW to implement a contract similar to the one it is seeking to impose at Ventra.

On March 19, prior to the negotiations between Tenneco and the UAW, workers voted for a strike authorization vote by 92 percent. After the expiration of the extended contract on May 13, workers were presented with a poverty contract that was voted down by 95 percent. This agreement had Tier 2 workers topping out at a \$2.50 raise by the fourth year, and Tier 1 workers receiving a \$1.20 raise. In reality these raises amount to massive pay cuts with inflation currently running above 9 percent.

After reading about the similar situation at Ventra

Evart forty miles away, a Tenneco worker spoke to the World Socialist Web Site.

“Our contract was up two years ago. we voted a two-year extension because of COVID. So, we were stuck for two years without a new contract, raises, or more vacation, and rising health care costs. We were put on the back burner by the company. We helped them company for two years. We didn’t get raises during the pandemic. We did get laid off for a little bit, but we worked through most of it.”

“I think it's a joke. Small plants like here in Greenville have not had the backing we need in a very long time. Every contract for the last 20 years at the Greenville plant has been concessionary, to me that doesn't seem like what our founding union members worked so hard for.

“The new plant manager, we handed him the position. He was an engineer about 27, 28 years old. We all recommended him, now he’s bending us over. It’s personal ... [Most] people are upset. It’s clear with the vote numbers against the contracts. They gained a small margin from 95 to 79 percent with fear. The majority of us want a strike. The cards are in our favor.

“Why does the UAW not want us to know what’s going on? The bargaining committee told us ‘we don’t know what to do next. Then the president says [UAW Local 2017 Matthew Stephens], ‘I want this to be done with.’ It’s frustrating! They won’t tell us anything. It’s been business as usual with a day-to-day contract. The company proposes a contract that increases our insurance premiums, and the raises they offer don't even cover the cost of living, let alone inflation. We would actually make less after four years. Even after we voted down the first, worst, offer, they bring that back to us saying it's a good and fair deal for all of us. It’s a joke!

“They [bargaining committee] supported the contract.” In an informational meeting, workers demanded to know who on the bargaining committee supported the contract. “Dan Kosheba [Regional UAW rep] shut that down. He makes right around \$135,000. We ended up voting it down by 79 percent. Why are they going through back channels waiting for the international [UAW]?” He went on to say, “[International President] Ray Curry doesn’t know how it is for us working in the plant and raising families. He’s getting the big money. They held information meetings on health care for a half hour at a time. They said it was ‘awesome’ insurance while the cost is going up. They tried to dazzle it with nonsense of pet insurance and other things. With the first contract being voted down, nobody bought their BS.

“They took retiree language out of the contract. Then they put it back. They’re trying to split retirees against current workers. Dan’s comments about how Ventra isn’t Big Three and they don’t deserve Big Three wages is exactly what is wrong with our union these days. Apparently we have another information meeting about the same insurance offered in the last two contracts next week on Tuesday and Wednesday ... [but] they aren’t going back to negotiations until Thursday. That’s telling me they are going to force us to take the insurance. Sounds very shady to me.”

When asked if the union was going to ram through the same contract, he replied, “That’s my thought exactly, why else would you agree to have a meeting about the same thing we turned down. Sounds like collusion to me.” Speaking on a strike at Tenneco he continued, “They wouldn’t stay running long with scabs. We make some parts so accurate, down to the micron. Someone off the street can’t do what we do. It hasn’t done any good with Kosheba and the [UAW] International.

“We make bearings for Deere, CAT, and Cummins. We make rod bearings for motors and bushings for pistons in every car out there. Now Buick is coming in. With all new transmission, you can’t run without our parts. One machine per shift can make 30,000 parts. Some, the bushings and bearings are then sold for about \$5 a piece. We have our own foundry in the plant too for export strip. We’re not greedy ,we just want to make a living!”

He commented on the Ventra Evart Workers Rank-

and-File Committee Statement, “I enjoyed it. I’ve been following them very closely since they’re in the same boat. They are right, it’s time to take a stand. As far as I’m concerned they [UAW] work for us and it’s about time they remember that. I think a joint struggle would be a great idea. The more people involved the more headway they could make. We’re all in the same situation. I know I’m not the only one at Tenneco that’s fed up.”



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