

# United Steelworkers president intervenes to block strike by Tenneco auto parts workers in Van Wert, Ohio

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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.*

The United Steelworkers (USW) is openly flouting a strike authorization vote by 300 Tenneco auto parts workers in Van Wert, Ohio. It follows reports that the United Auto Workers (UAW) has rammed through a contract at a Tenneco plant in Greenville, Michigan after workers there rejected two sellout deals and voted to strike.

Tenneco Inc. is the product of a winding series of mergers and spinoffs, like many other parts company. 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.

The last deal at Van Wert brought to workers by the USW included a paltry \$1 wage increase in the first year of the contract, followed by 60 cents in the remaining three years. The deal would have allowed the company to bring in temporary workers in the first year of the contract and would have doubled out-of-pocket health care expenses. Workers overwhelmingly voted down this deal.

After workers voted to authorize strike action, local president Patrick Herman issued a letter which made clear that USW International President Tom Conway, the USW district director, and a USW attorney intervened to prevent a strike, citing the money which the company would lose. He wrote: "At 10:15 PM I received a call from what I believe to be the same group of union leadership and they informed me they

had talked to the company and the company doesn't have any more to give. They said the company informed them they will lose customers if we strike and they will close the plant."

However, the entire point of a strike is to impact the company financially and force it to give up concessions it does not want to give. Presumably, Conway and company would have only permitted a strike in a case where the company would not lose money. As for the threat of closing the plant, Conway and his toadies are acting shamelessly as conduits for management threats, in a bid to intimidate workers.

Meanwhile, workers at the Tenneco plant in Greenville, Michigan say that the UAW forced through a contract that was twice rejected by 95 and then 79 percent. "[UAW] scared all the newer people," a Tenneco worker stated. "Same old song. 'This is the best we can do; we don't want the doors to close, we might end up in here working for \$15 an hour.' [The UAW] lied about how our insurance would work. You name it, they said it. It was the same exact contract we voted down the last time; all they did was change two or three sentences. It was something like 166 yes 77 no."

However, the contract which workers were forced to vote on was not even completed at the time of the vote. Two days after it passed, the UAW and the company were 'still ironing out the gray areas.'" the worker said. "If it wasn't set in stone it shouldn't have been brought to us let alone put to a vote. They're rolling it out in segments apparently, they don't know how to do everything it says at once so it won't all go in effect until the 29th, bits and pieces at a time." Van Wert workers read a recent interview with workers in

Greenville on the *World Socialist Web Site* and reached out to discuss the treachery of the USW at their plant. “Everyone said it was the same as Greenville,” a production worker stated. “We went to the union meeting and voted no for an extension and voted for a strike. By 10:15 p.m. the [local] president told us there will be no strike according to the International USW. Our contract was extended in 2020 for two years because of COVID. Now we’re extending the contract even more because the USW said not to strike. At another plant they had the same USW rep and same circumstances with the contract. They said it was best for the benefit of the company. The union works for the company, what’s the point of the union?”

“Nobody is happy. Roughly 326 workers are on the seniority list. 75 to 80 percent voted against the extension. I saw that parts workers at Ventra Evert and Greenville went through the very same thing. It’s at every plant. The district rep and international reps told us that ‘we can’t have the doors shut.’ It’s a scare tactic to get us to vote yes on the contract.

“I have the 2019 earnings for each of these guys. [District 1 Director] Donald Blatt made \$159,713, [Local 626 Chair] Eric Sweeney made \$73,108, [Sub-district Director] Brian Sealy \$121,857 and Tom Conway made \$210,395. Some of the skilled trades have their pay top out with a \$1.60 raise, and they’re messing with chromium, which is highly toxic. The officials are like locusts that are afraid of workers. We just need a little, and they took our vacation time away instead.

“I read about the situation at Dana and how the Kroger union is in cahoots. I’ve been a factory worker for over a decade, and been under union factories, with the same result. We don’t have mandated overtime but most of us work 10-12 hour shifts, especially those on third shift. Those seniority workers starting in the ‘60s, ‘70s or the ‘80s have the highest seniority, but do not get compensated. It’s not right. We work in 100 degrees, and maybe once in awhile they give us a popsicle. The UAW told our union president that workers there [Greenville] were okay with the contract.

“We should all strike. Our parts are precise to the millimeter, you can’t just get any person off the street. They don’t even train well enough to begin with. They can give more than they are offering. Every plant I

worked at has been worse and worse.

“The conditions are worse with the printing of money. Now inflation is eight percent, which is not great. The last five years, a lot has happened in the country. They’re not obligated to pay us—fine, give us time off then. This system is not working. They don’t come into the plant and don’t know how to operate it. Our reps are 500 miles away. Our strike and contract votes matter, not some union convention for their getaway. They extended our contracts and went to Vegas and later California with our dues money. Eric Sweeney posted all over Facebook about how he was going to Vegas, but it’s our money! They’re doing us wrong. We pay the government and union but they’re not doing their jobs. It’s like a police state with the union. It’s upsetting so many companies are doing the same thing taking advantage of us.”

He concluded, “We should reach out to the Greenville workers!”



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