

Resistance grows as UAW seeks to ram through Nexteer sellout

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There is widespread opposition to the sellout agreement the United Auto Workers is seeking to ram past 3,350 auto parts workers at the Nexteer Automotive complex in Saginaw, Michigan. The deal retains poverty level wages, imposes high out of pocket health care costs and maintains grueling work schedules at the parts factories formerly owned by General Motors.

Having pushed through four-year agreements at GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler, which include some of the lowest labor cost increases for any UAW contracts in history, the UAW is determined to prevent a struggle by Nexteer workers. The Saginaw workers produce critical steering systems for popular pickup trucks and other vehicles that are largely responsible for the record profits of the Detroit automakers.

UAW International and local officials are forcing Nexteer workers to vote without the opportunity to study the full details of the deal. Voting will take place on Sunday, the same day as UAW Local 699 and International UAW reps plan to hold so-called informational meetings.

As of this writing, Nexteer workers have still not seen the full contract, only bogus “highlights.” UAW Local 699 officials claim the documents are not ready to post on the local’s web site or Facebook page, and that it is too costly to print sufficient copies for the whole membership.

“We will be voting right after the meeting,” a Nexteer worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. “They are trying to jam this concession contract down our throats right away. Chad Wurtzel, our UAW International rep, said at our previous union meeting that we would have a few days to look over the contract. Lies again!”

Another worker wrote on the Local 699 Facebook

page, “You sign contracts for cars/places to live/Loans. Why would I agree with a contract that isn’t fully available to me?”

Another added, “I want the contract in writing! All of it. Every brother and sister gets a copy! Not just the highlighted areas. I’ve been screwed over way to many times by the grey areas! Stand together brothers and sisters... Demand a copy of contract! Solidarity.”

GM sold the Saginaw steering plants in 1999 as part of the spinoff of its Delphi parts division. Workers faced savage job, wage and pension cuts when Delphi declared bankruptcy in 2005. The factories were resold to GM in 2009, and the company promptly demanded, with the full backing of the UAW, more givebacks to entice a new owner to buy the complex. In 2010, the factories were bought by Beijing-based Pacific Century Motors, which then hired hundreds of low-wage workers from the economically-depressed area.

With Nexteer making record profits, workers are determined to recoup lost wages and benefits. The new agreement being pushed by the UAW, however, ignores workers’ demands and is tailored to meet the needs of the corporation and the Detroit automakers, which insist on the flow of low-cost parts into their assembly plants.

The hated multi-tier wage and benefit system is retained, with the UAW agreeing to at least nine separate pay tiers. Production workers who currently make between \$12 and \$16.48 an hour will see an insulting raise to \$15.85 to \$17.25 by 2019. New hires starting at \$13 an hour will receive \$15.35 after four years.

So-called legacy workers—those hired before 2006—in the “specialized” category will receive a two percent wage increase in the first year, a one percent wage increase in year three, plus two lump sum bonuses.

They will max out at \$20.27 an hour. Meanwhile, “semi-skilled” workers will get a top wage of \$21.27.

The contract does not restore cost of living adjustments (COLA) and will allow the company to continue to fire and rehire the lowest-paid workers—temps making \$12 an hour—because they will not become permanent until they reach 90 days.

“There are dismal wage increases for skilled trades and production workers,” a Nexteer worker told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “with B-bucket people [a category of production workers] receiving only a 52 cent raise in the four-year agreement after being there nine years and two previous rounds of concessions.” In addition, he said, “Long-term disability time has been shortened, there is no more SUB (Supplemental Unemployment Benefits) pay, and there are no strike-able health and safety issues.”

The deal also includes crushing increases in health care costs. “Our PPO health care, which was free, now costs \$385 a month, plus HMO, which is free, now includes increased co-pays. Also our \$600 ‘well-care’ Visa health card has been decreased to \$300.” Finally, the already inferior 401 (k) retirement plans are being watered down for temps who are made permanent.

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Like the Big Three contracts, “team leaders” are given 50 cents more an hour to drive up productivity and collaborate with management to punish workers for absenteeism when their bodies break down due to mandatory overtime.

“I can sum this up as: I don’t need the UAW to negotiate concessionary contracts, I can do that myself,” the Nexteer worker said.

Another Nexteer worker who subscribed to the *Autoworker Newsletter* wrote, “We were sold out by Chad Wurtzel from the International and by the bargaining committee. Poverty level new hires (40 percent of the workforce get a \$0.50 raise and a top out of \$15.36 at the end of four years. Our bargaining chair Bob Glaser was trying to recoup concessions from the 2010 UAW/GM sellout contract deal. Nexteer called International UAW rep Chad Wurtzel (Chad was fired from Nexteer and a family member got him appointed to the International and his current \$133,000 salary) to step in and squash the demands.

“We are an IPS (Independent Parts Supplier) now and

shouldn’t have the International meddling in our affairs. We had dues increased to fund a strike and approved a strike and Chad denied our right to do so. He negotiated strikeable issues first, removing the ability to walk out and pulled committee members individually into rooms and had them sign off on sub pay, no more PPO coverage by Nexteer, holiday deferment, incentive comp bonus, poverty wage levels, etc.

“Now they cancelled Sunday’s regularly scheduled union meeting because of the backlash and are making us vote Sunday in five separate blocks at the Dow Event Center in Saginaw for a rollout meeting and vote. No time to review the contract. Each session is limited to 750 people, and its first come first serve. If you’re number 751 at the door, too bad, come back later. They are trying to suppress voting, and it is criminal!”

Nexteer workers should reject this sellout deal with the contempt it deserves. However, the experience of the Fiat Chrysler, GM and Ford workers shows that the UAW will do everything it can, including joining with management to threaten jobs or even seeking to starve workers into submission by calling an isolated strike, to impose the dictates of the corporations.

The resistance of Nexteer workers must be organized through the election of factory committees, democratically controlled by the rank-and-file, to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the UAW. Only on this basis can Nexteer workers fight for the broadest mobilization of autoworkers and the entire working class to oppose poverty-level wages.



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