

Massive “no” vote by Nexteer workers rejects UAW sellout

Our reporting team
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Nexteer Automotive workers in the US have voted overwhelmingly to defeat the sellout deal reached by the United Auto Workers for a new four-year labor agreement covering 3,350 steering components workers in Saginaw, Michigan.

According to official results posted online Monday morning, more than 97 percent of workers rejected the agreement. Only 80 workers voted “yes,” against 3,103 who voted “no.”

The rejection of the deal, which includes wages as low as \$12 an hour, grueling work schedules and high out-of-pocket health care costs, is a massive repudiation of the UAW, which functions as an arm of corporate management.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calls on Nexteer workers to immediately form a rank-and-file factory committee to discuss and plan the next steps in the fight against the company and its stooges in the UAW. We urge workers to organize a meeting of workers independent of all UAW officials to formulate demands and issue an appeal for support to auto workers throughout the industry. (See, “Vote ‘no’ on UAW-Nexteer sellout: Form a rank-and-file factory committee to fight the auto companies”)

The WSWS will do everything it can to assist workers in coordinating opposition and contacting auto workers at GM, Ford and FCA. Contact us by signing up for the *Autoworker Newsletter* at wsws.org/autoworkers.

During voting on Sunday, workers expressed outraged that the vote was scheduled only days after the release of the details of the contract. The vote took place as the UAW held so-called informational meetings to try to sell the deal. Instead well-informed workers peppered UAW Local 699 officials and UAW International rep Chad Wurtzel with angry questions.

Sheriff’s deputies were on hand to protect the UAW officials from rank-and-file workers. One worker told the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*, “The police are stationed where they can see what workers are voting—yes or no—so they know what every one of us has voted.

“We heard about the vote rigging at Ford, and we think

that’s what they might do here, too. They should have an independent group count all the votes, not leave it up to the union. People have to understand it’s not just the UAW we’re up against. It’s the Big Three and the politicians, too.”

One worker holding a vote ‘no’ sign told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “They’re taking our health care, taking away our deferred holidays, taking everything.”

“Health care is the biggest item. People have to pay out of pocket for health services and that can bankrupt you. Whole families are supposed to live on a monthly cash stipend of \$300 a month, when lots of these workers have health care costs in the thousands.”

“You guys are spot on it with what you’ve been saying,” the worker said of the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*. “The guy from the International sat up there and lied to us. We are at poverty level and this contract sure isn’t going to change that. Everybody thinks the UAW is worthless. They are gunning for a cheaper work force, with the “flex” schedule, where they can work you on whatever crazy schedule they want.”

“At the same time, they’re taking away the overtime options, when some of us really need the hours. I need to work overtime to survive. I work in the plant 55-plus hours per week and right now I am living off of \$3 dollars until Wednesday.”

Hundreds of workers took copies of the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*, which included the statement “Vote ‘no’ on UAW-Nexteer sellout,” that calls on workers to build factory committees to take the struggle out of the hands of the UAW.

When a UAW official attempted to intimidate WSWS campaigners, a worker intervened and said to the union bureaucrat, “Oh, now you show up,” alluding to the fact that UAW officials were nowhere to be found in the days before the deal was announced. Like the workers at Fiat Chrysler, GM and Ford before them, Nexteer workers were kept in the dark and subjected to bogus “strike deadlines” and so-called last minute agreements before the UAW

attempted to ram through pro-company deals.

A veteran worker told the newsletter, “We had a 98.7 percent vote in favor of a strike. We gave a five-day strike notice, and what does our committee do? They extend that, saying ‘we’re close.’ The contract doesn’t come to anything. Why waste the paper and the time?”

Another veteran said, “From what I can see the contract is BS. They didn’t give us time to think. How do they expect us to work at a factory for \$2 more than the minimum wage? Upper management gets bonuses every year; they are not the ones doing the work.”

Another worker said, “This is the biggest rip-off I have seen. The union is handing out highlights, but they don’t list the concessions. We are being sold out. All they want is to preserve that multimillion-dollar strike fund. It is about greed on the part of the International and the corporation.

“We have lost so much ground. Yet the company couldn’t resist going on television and bragging about how much money they are making. Taxes are going up, water rates are going up, gas bills are going up. We are not getting rich. I had to work 56 hours last week just to pay my bills.”

“It is hardly surprising that you hear on the news each day about people picking up guns and going crazy.”

GM sold off the complex during the spinoff of its Delphi parts division in 1999. Workers then took savage wage and benefit cuts during the Delphi bankruptcy, and then GM bought the plants back in 2009. GM and the UAW then demanded even further cuts to entice a new owner, Beijing-based Pacific Century Motors, to buy the plants. As one worker wryly noted on a Facebook page of Nexteer workers, “Fortunately for all of us we won’t have to take unemployment long, cuz at the rate we’re going here China is going to be closing down their factories and sending them here for lower wages.”

Another worker at Sunday’s vote told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “I have gone nine years without a raise, now they want to give us 20 cents. Our last contract (in 2010) was turned down. So they threatened that the plant would close and we would be out of jobs. Then we had another vote and it passed. How do you turn an 85 percent ‘no’ vote to 92 percent ‘yes,’ and it was basically the same thing?”

A worker hired in 2006 said, “I think the contract we have now is better than this. I didn’t even see it until this morning. I was a new hire. We got \$14 in 2006. It is borderline poverty. Then I took a buy-down under Delphi of \$30,000. So I am now at \$14.50.

“Without my wife working I wouldn’t be able to make it. It takes a toll on your body. I had been in the machining department. When I went to work on the line for two months all my joints hurt. I couldn’t imagine doing that for 10 years.”

Another worker with nine years said, “There is going to be a big ‘no’ vote. Our big problem is not with the company for offering this contract but with our union officials for accepting it. Our wages are comparable to those in a nonunion facility.

“I haven’t been able to find anyone who is going to vote for it. Our union officers are getting an earful.”

“The contract is horrible and nobody wants it,” another worker said. “I don’t even want to wear this UAW jacket anymore. They are doing some dirty-handed crap. Anybody with a pair of eyes can see it.

“The UAW rep in there started going on a rant about how we need to elect more Democrats. That’s all they have to say after five years of concessions. We took the brunt of the losses five years ago, supposedly as a sacrifice until ‘the company was up and running.’ Now they’re raking it in, and their boot is on our neck twice as hard.

“The union is using intimidation tactics, and they will find any reason to get you fired. The UAW tells us to keep our heads down and accept it. I may as well get a job as a burger flipper and move in with my parents.”

One worker with six years said he was particularly upset about the treatment of temporary workers. “Some have been here four years and they are going to have to go another four years to make \$15.85.

“They are bringing in flex workers to cut overtime. It is not about what is best for the people; it is about what is best for the millionaires. You can’t live on \$12 an hour,” he said referring to the current starting wage.

“It is disgusting. And the skilled trades are only going to get \$24-25 an hour. The good ones will all leave to go somewhere else if all they are being paid is that kind of money.

“I think the UAW has become a buddy-buddy system. They are not about what is good for the people. I believe we need a new organization.

“With the money we are making you almost have to live with two other people to meet a mortgage payment. If you are on ‘B’ or ‘C’ shift you have no relationship with your family. It breaks up families.

“If a facility is designated ‘critical’ then you have to be there for 90 days straight, no matter what. They want to work you and work you so much that you don’t have time to think about politics.”



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