After the “no” vote at Nexteer: A message from a Ford worker

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The following is an interview with a Ford worker from Louisville, Kentucky who has been following the situation at Nexteer and has a message for the thousands of workers who voted “no” on the sellout agreement between the company and the UAW. The interview was conducted after the landslide “no” vote against a contract backed by the UAW and before the strike that began at 12:01 on Tuesday morning.

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I’ve just been through this process of the contract fight at the Big Three. I’ve been around long enough to know that the UAW and the company were trying to pull the wool over my eyes, and I have seen myself how this works, back from when GM sold off Delphi [a part of which later became Nexteer] and all that. I was at Chrysler at the time, but I was in a smaller situation like that. This was not my first rodeo.

Nexteer workers: stand strong. Believe in your fight. A 98 percent “no” is impressive. I hope that that’s in part because of the BS that came out of the Big Three ordeal, and that the workers are able to make sure that they get their votes counted because of the chaos that we had.

At Ford, who knows if the UAW didn’t cheat the vote—who knows if there wasn’t a box of “yes” votes in the back of Santa’s station wagon? There was some crazy stuff that went down through our fight, but it was a big learning process for me.

For one, you have to keep an eye on every little thing. Watch the process. There are a lot of questionable things that need to be raised amongst workers, and not just on Facebook. Why did voting happen in garbage cans [at Ford]? Why did the police need to watch the workers vote at Nexteer? Monitor your votes. Make sure it’s secure, where you can make your decision democratically without the UAW people coming up to you and telling you how to vote.

You’ve got to group together, sit down and have a plan. Go vote the way you need to as a team to get what you want. Don’t take it. I just wish that would have happened at the Big Three. You need to all stick together and make sure everyone is on the same page. Make sure everybody is educated as much as you can as far as the contract goes. Make sure you know what the UAW is trying to do and look for the loopholes, because we’re already experiencing our loopholes at Ford.

You’ve got to read the *Autoworker Newsletter* and build rank-and-file committees.

Use your time wisely. If you don’t have a lot of time, you’ve got to band together right now and have your own meeting, without the UAW. You have to hash it over yourselves and look. Take a 1,000-page contract and have groups take different numbers of pages. Pass the parts out and have each little subgroup specialize in the different parts of the contract and all come together in one final meeting to have each one brushed up on the whole thing, to say, “Ok this is what we got.”

The UAW isn’t going to provide that. They’re siding with the company, and the company is telling them how the contract is to be read. I’ve seen it myself. The company tells you it’s going to be read a certain way. That’s where the fight was lost because the UAW doesn’t have the balls to fight them. They just let the company decide the language.

Now the [Big Three] companies are saying it’s the best deal for them. The corporate analysts are saying the working class got beaten over again. In some way, the UAW people need to be out of there. All that crooked activity is going to be there otherwise. The UAW won this time. They won for Wall Street.

But for us, I don’t ever remember things being this

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bad as a kid, and my dad was a Ford worker. There were struggles, and the UAW stood up back then. A friend of mine's dad at Ohio Ford, those people didn't take anything. I don't remember as a kid it being like this, where the UAW are all yes-men.

Now the UAW is just a business, and the working class doesn't matter. The UAW has money to make and they say "shut up and like it." That's damn near what it is, and to do the tactics that they did to make it happen is just wrong.

In our case, the UAW threatened job losses. We don't want to lose jobs, but we don't want Mexican workers to hurt either. Why wouldn't the UAW fight for our retirees? That was a smack in the face. The whole thing was a smack in the face.

The UAW hired a PR firm. That tactic used membership dues and it was wrong. It was another smack in the face. Something like that should have been voted on, because hell no I wouldn't want them to teach me what good is in this contract when I can read.

The PR firm was an attempt to stop workers from getting together. But we got together and shut the PR firm down. And the UAW has their Facebook trolls telling people to vote yes. One UAW guy said, "Quit your bitching and let the company take care of its shareholders for once." Right.

And their highlights were lies. Look at the contract [in 2011] with the 25 percent cap for the second tier at FCA. The UAW said that was a typo. It lowers my belief again. They just keep reassuring me that they aren't worth anything.

I've been saying all along the UAW is a mud vein. With everything that was done throughout the contract fight, they lost my confidence even more.

With Nexteer, you've got to get together soon. You're going to have to all get together and sit down; 3,200 workers is a lot of workers. If you got on and made groups on Facebook soon and had a sign-up and had everybody know that they're in opposition, that would help. If they could get thousands of people to sign up, that'd be a lot. Then the plant would start talking, and they can get information through and educate each other before they have to go vote again. Question the contract, question the UAW.

And then there's people like [Local 551 Vice President] Scott Houldieson. I was getting into it with him on Facebook because he is pro-company and all of a sudden acts like he's for the people. Don't fall for him.

Regarding the *Autoworker Newsletter*: have an open mind with what your reading. The *Newsletter* won me over because it's in touch with my reality, and I still fight for it. If I see someone making a negative remark about the *World Socialist Web Site* I'll put in my two cents. They write what's happening. Reality. If someone says we're full of it, read it and decide for yourself and understand it. It's your life and you can decide for yourself.

I started reading the *Newsletter* and it hit me, "Wow, these guys are right on." To be honest we've held lots of meetings, and I think we're still right on, and it's a relief to hear that there are workers all over getting involved with the fight waged by the *Autoworker Newsletter*. That there are other people going through what I'm going through because now I know I'm not the only one. Inform each other. If people read the Newsletter, they'll understand it.

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