

Over 3,300 auto parts workers strike in Saginaw, Michigan

The way forward for Nexteer workers

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The following statement is available in pdf format for download. We encourage workers to distribute it as widely as possible.

More than 3,300 Nexteer Automotive workers in Saginaw, Michigan walked off their jobs at 12:01 Tuesday morning after a sweeping 97.5 percent rejection of a United Auto Workers-backed contract that included poverty-level wages, grueling work schedules and increases in out-of-pocket health care costs.

The Nexteer workers deserve and need the support of all autoworkers and every section of the working class in the US and internationally. Their struggle is a reflection of the deep and growing opposition all over the world to record inequality and the continuous demands that workers sacrifice to increase the wealth of the super-rich.

The claims by the auto bosses that they cannot afford to pay decent wages and benefits are a lie. Nexteer, like the Big Three automakers, is raking in record profits, paying multi-million salaries and stock bonuses and even more to their Wall Street and global investors.

As far as the companies are concerned, autoworkers—who were once the highest paid industrial workers in the US—should be little more than industrial slaves. This is part of a worldwide process, accelerated since the 2008 crash, that has funneled vast sums into the hands of the corporate and financial elite, to the point in which 20 billionaires in the US now control the same amount of wealth as half of the country's population, more than 150 million people.

One worker on the picket line described the mood of workers as “joyous but leery.” This sentiment expresses both the desire to fight for their rights and the

understanding that the organization that has called the strike, the UAW, is not on the side of the workers.

To organize the struggle, the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* urges rank-and-file Nexteer workers to elect factory committees to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the UAW, and to compile and issue demands for the strike in order to win the widest possible support for this battle. These should include: abolition of the multi-tier wage and benefit system, an immediate 30 percent wage increase and the restoration of COLA and full employer-paid health care and pension benefits.

The threats by the company to use strikebreakers, cut off health care benefits or even close the plant must be answered by the full mobilization of workers in Saginaw and Flint, and by workers throughout Michigan and the US. An appeal should be made to autoworkers throughout the world, including in China and Mexico, for a common struggle against the global auto companies.

The experience of the Fiat Chrysler, GM and Ford workers has demonstrated that the UAW will not respond to the pressure of workers. It is not a “union” or “workers organization” in any meaningful sense of the word. Instead, the UAW is a multi-billion business, with a substantial stock ownership stake in GM and the other automakers. The highly-paid executives of the UAW have a direct financial incentive in driving down the wages of workers and increasing their exploitation.

The UAW has only called the strike at Nexteer because of the powerful rebellion by rank-and-file workers, which it neither anticipated nor desired. Far from mobilizing the strength of all autoworkers, the UAW intends to isolate the strike, like it is doing to the

Kohler workers in Wisconsin, and try to starve workers into submission without any significant deductions from its massive \$600 million strike fund.

Nexteer workers should draw lessons from the experience at the Big Three. When Fiat Chrysler workers rejected the first sellout, the UAW hired a PR firm to repackage the deal and used economic blackmail to ram it through. At GM, the UAW ignored the “no” vote by skilled workers and overrode its own constitutional bylaws to push the contract through.

The campaign of thuggery culminated in the vote at Ford, where the UAW resorted to outright ballot stuffing in order to secure a miraculous turnaround in a contract vote that was heading for defeat, claiming a razor-thin 51 percent margin for ratification. Afterwards, Ford executives and Wall Street investors boasted that with the help of their “partners” in the UAW, they had secured a deal that cost them less than 1.5 percent in additional labor expenses per year, lower than the rate of inflation.

The UAW is politically allied with the Obama administration and the Democratic Party, which no less than the Republicans are the tools of the big corporations and banks. The slashing of wages and the shifting of health care and pension costs from the corporations to the backs of workers has been the central economic policy of the Obama administration, along with the shoveling of trillions in virtually free money to Wall Street speculators.

Both the White House and the UAW have promoted “in-sourcing,” which means enticing global corporations, like Pacific Century Motors, the Chinese firm that owns Nexteer, to seek their cheap labor needs in the US instead of China, Mexico and other low-wage countries.

The last thing the UAW wants is for this struggle to trigger a renewed battle by Big Three autoworkers against the auto bosses and their agents in the UAW. But this is precisely what is needed. Behind the intransigence of Nexteer are the Detroit-based automakers that depend on a steady supply of cheap components from brutally exploited parts workers. This can only be broken by the full mobilization of all autoworkers.

During the contract battle at FCA, GM and Ford, the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* was followed by thousands of workers and played a central role in

mobilizing opposition to the treachery of the UAW. That is why the UAW used anti-socialist red-baiting against the *Newsletter* and barred our reporters from the press conference with UAW Vice President James Settles, who made the lying claim that the Ford deal was “one of the richest the UAW ever negotiated.”

The *Autoworker Newsletter* will do everything it can to help forge connections between Nexteer workers and workers at the Big Three companies, where there is continued opposition to miserable wages and working conditions. There is a new desire to fight among autoworkers and every section of the working class, including steelworkers, teachers, telecom workers and others.

The outcome of the struggle at Nexteer will depend on the independent initiative of rank-and-file workers, reaching out to mobilize the broadest support in the working class in the US and internationally.



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