

# Nexteer autoworkers on strike denounce UAW-Nexteer contract

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Striking Nexteer autoworkers on the picket lines Tuesday spoke out against the latest concessions contract negotiated by the United Auto Workers (UAW). The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* spoke to workers prior to an announcement late on Tuesday that the UAW was calling off a strike, which lasted less than a day, on the basis of a new agreement that workers have not had a chance to see, let alone ratify.

On Sunday, workers at Nexteer overwhelmingly rejected, by 97.5 percent, a contract backed by the UAW that offered a meager pay raise of mere pennies per hour, while imposing new health care costs and other concessions. In an effort to let off steam, the UAW called a strike that began at 12:01 Tuesday morning.

Among Nexteer workers, there was a deep desire to fight. “We’re fighting for the whole working class,” Jeff, a worker with six years at the plant, said. “They keep us working all the time so we don’t have any time to see what is going on politically against us.

“As far as the UAW, they have stock in GM, so how can they be for us? Lots of people out here work 70 hours a week and are barely making ends meet. In 2006, when this was still Delphi, I came in at \$14 an hour. In 2010 we voted down the contract and they immediately laid off workers.”

“The company and the union said the plant would be ‘wound down’ if we didn’t accept the deal to make us competitive for a new owner,” Jim, a veteran worker, said. “The majority took it because we were told there would be more business and jobs in the future, and in the next contract we would get it back. Instead we get a contract that might as well include a massive pay cut, with the added health care costs we’ll have to pay.

“We would make 97 cents more over four years but pay five times that in increased health care costs. I’m paid \$12.48 an hour, and with the added health costs my pay would be something more like \$10.41 an hour.”

Marrio added: “They think we are stupid. Really, we know a whole lot. We know that our union tops are living the lives of wealthy businessmen, with all the perks. We know the price of a gallon of milk because we have to. I doubt any of those bureaucrats could name the price; they never have to think about it.

“We’re working seventy, eighty hours out here and barely making ends meet. We’re out here living off of Ramen noodles and PB&J. We can’t survive on \$12 an hour. They want to give us a 52-cent raise over 10 years, while making us pay five times as much for health care. This contract was a slap in the face.”

“We spoke with one voice when we rejected the contract,” Marrio said. “The UAW has not done anything for us for years. We think they may have stuffed the ballot in 2010 here, like they just did at Ford.”

“The *Autoworker Newsletter* has opened our eyes,” another worker said. “What I like the most is that it doesn’t take the position as the regular media, which is pro-company and pro-government. People here are waking up. In 2010, we made concessions to get the company on its feet when the economy was down and GM was recovering from bankruptcy. We were promised better wages but then were sold down the line. Within the first three months under Delphi we were taking concessions. Now we have nine tiers here.”

“We were making \$14.06 in 2006 and are basically making \$16.28 now,” another worker, Tina, said. “We’re working seven days a week and now they want to make us pay \$300 more a week for health care. Plus they want to take away SUB pay (Supplemental Unemployment Benefits).”

“Another part of the contract basically puts spies in the plant to watch us. They are hiring these guys from a temporary agency because they say we are damaging their machines. This is basically Big Brother stuff.”

Freddie, a younger worker, said, “We are striking

before Christmas. It hurts, but we're fighting for our kids and their future. This contract was a slap in the face. We're getting 20 cents a year, and they are taking more than that back with health care cuts.

"Workers are angry that the UAW brought this contract back. A while back the UAW called in the FBI to protect officials who they said were threatened by workers. Some guys were sent to jail because they were angry that the UAW officials sold them out."

Brian said, "People are so desperate, they know they can fire us in a second. I've been a union man for going on thirty years, most of it with the UAW. I've seen how this organization has changed. We used to get something, at least something, in return for our dues. Today, we're paying them to keep us at the poverty line.

"I was making \$12 per hour back in 1987. With this contract, I'd be making almost \$13 per hour. Do you know how far prices have increased in the meantime? I'm working seven days a week and I'm still scraping by. I work very hard, long hours, every single day. I do it because its necessary to keep my family housed and fed."

The WSWs team also spoke with veteran autoworker Chad at a McDonalds in Saginaw, Michigan. "The union is not like it used to be," he said. "When my dad was at Dow Chemical in 1970, the union was still able to take a real stand. Now there is clearly a lot of shady stuff going on inside the union. There are lots of rumors in the plant that union people are working secretly with management. We call them the 'next tier' employees."

"As workers we're held responsible for all of our actions. But the supervisors do whatever they want, and the company and the union back them 100 percent. Our so-called UAW reps never even bother to return our calls. They are probably too busy golfing with management, something we know they do. I think the only reason the union went on strike is because they were afraid that the workers would rebel."



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