

After less than 24 hours, UAW shuts down Nexteer strike

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9 December 2015

In a demonstration of complete contempt for auto workers, the United Auto Workers ordered an end to the strike at Nexteer late Tuesday night, halting a walkout less than 24 hours after it began. The UAW International, which took over negotiations Tuesday morning, instructed Local 699 to send its 3,350 members back to work without a contract and without any opportunity to vote on the end of the strike.

On Sunday, Nexteer workers rejected a UAW-backed sellout agreement by a near unanimous vote, with 97.5 percent of the workers voting “no.” Faced with a rebellion, the UAW called the strike but had no intention of mobilizing autoworkers in any serious struggle. On the contrary, the 22-hour walkout was a cynical maneuver, recalling the bogus “Hollywood strikes” called by the UAW at GM and Chrysler in 2007 before agreeing to the hated two-tier wage system.

Workers were informed that the strike was being called off in a perfunctory statement on the UAW Local 699 Facebook page. “More information to follow as information becomes available,” the statement read. At a hastily-prepared press conference Tuesday night, UAW Regional Director Gerald Kariem refused to release any details but claimed that the UAW had reached “an agreement that satisfied both the members and improved their lives and their future, [while] trying to make sure that the company is viable.”

Nothing the UAW claims can be taken at face value. It is quite possible that no contract has even been reached. Any deal would have been dictated by GM and Nexteer executives. With the walkout threatening to lead to a shortage of critical steering components and the idling of plants that make the most profitable vehicles for GM and other automakers, the UAW quickly halted the strike.

Over the next few days, workers will be subjected to a joint campaign by the UAW and the company of lies and intimidation to blackmail workers into accepting another sellout deal that contains all of the onerous demands—poverty wages, high health care costs and forced overtime—that were in the original one.

It is impossible that workers could have wrenched any concessions from Nexteer on the basis of a strike that was called off before it had any significant impact on the bottom lines of the auto parts maker and the Detroit auto giants. By shutting down the strike, the UAW is seeking to take the initiative out of the hands of workers and hand it to the corporations.

Under the just-in-time delivery system, GM—the former owner of the Saginaw factory complex that accounts for more than half of Nexteer’s business—would soon run out of parts for its hot-selling Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra pickups. Workers at the Flint Assembly plant were already being told to check with plant management before reporting to work because the factory was on the verge of running out of parts.

On Monday, GM executives reportedly held meetings in nearby Bay City, Michigan, where they no doubt gave the UAW marching orders to shut down the strike. The UAW, which owns billions of dollars in GM stock, quickly obeyed. The UAW feared that if the strike began to impact the giant automakers it could serve as a catalyst for the renewal of the battle of GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers.

The longer the struggle lasted, the UAW also feared, the greater the influence of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. The newsletter, which is read by thousands of autoworkers and was instrumental in mobilizing opposition to the sellout contracts at GM, Ford and Chrysler, has won a growing readership among Nexteer

workers. The call for the formation of factory committees to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the UAW and unify the fight of all autoworkers won a powerful hearing from workers on the picket lines Tuesday. (See: “Nexteer autoworkers on strike denounce UAW-Nexteer contract”).

So explosive are class tensions in the US that the corporate and political establishment, which includes the UAW apparatus, cannot allow the slightest expression of opposition by the working class. CBS News reported the Nexteer strike as the eruption of “labor unrest” in Michigan, well aware of the deep anger in the working class over relentless attacks on jobs and living standards while the super-rich have never had it so good.

As one Nexteer worker told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “Workers cannot be heard until they make a major impact. A lot of people would have followed our lead. The only way things will change is if our voices are heard. But the strike was called off before we could have such an impact.”

Once again, the UAW has demonstrated that it functions as an industrial police force for the corporations and the government. Allied with the Obama administration, whose chief economic policy is to slash wages and shift the cost of health care and pensions onto the backs of workers, the UAW is desperately seeking to beat back the resistance of workers to poverty wages and a return to industrial slavery.

No organization that genuinely represented workers would send them out on strike and then order them back to work like puppets on a string. While there has rarely been such a display of rotten treachery, this stab in the back is entirely in line with the actions of the UAW throughout the struggle at Nexteer and at the Big Three auto companies.

Both the massive “no” vote and the sentiment for a fight among Nexteer workers continued and built on the deep anger and opposition of autoworkers in the Big Three, along with John Deere workers, Kohler workers and workers throughout the US and internationally.

Over the past several months, the UAW has worked deliberately and systematically to overcome this opposition through threats, lies and fraud. At Fiat Chrysler, workers voted down the first sellout

agreement. The UAW issued a phony “strike notification” before calling it off at the last minute, announcing a new agreement and ramming it through with the assistance of a PR firm. At GM, mass opposition was reflected in the “no” vote by skilled trades workers, which the UAW simply ignored when it decided to ratify the agreement in violation of its constitutional bylaws.

Finally, at Ford, workers charged that the UAW resorted to outright ballot-stuffing to secure a miraculous 51 percent “yes” vote after the contract was heading to defeat.

The experience of the last several months has proven that nothing can be accomplished within the framework of this labor-corporate syndicate. The way forward for workers is to develop new forms of democratic self-representation, including factory committees based on the methods of the class struggle, not collaboration with the corporations and the big business politicians.

The WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* calls on Nexteer workers to immediately organize their own meetings, run by rank-and-file workers, to mount a campaign to defeat this second sellout and issue an appeal to GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers for a genuine fight against the auto giants and their agents in the UAW. If a struggle is to be waged, everything depends on the independent initiative of workers themselves.



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