

Nexteer victimizes dozens of workers as UAW prepares new sellout

Eric London
11 December 2015

In the days after the United Auto Workers (UAW) shut down a one-day strike by 3,350 workers at Nexteer Automotive, the company has fired dozens of workers at its steering components complex in Saginaw, Michigan. Workers have told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that up to 30 of their co-workers have been victimized on trumped charges of “unsatisfactory work performance.”

The highly provocative move comes as the UAW prepares to release details of a new tentative contract with the auto parts maker. On December 6, workers rejected the first UAW-Nexteer sellout by a near-unanimous 97.5 percent.

Faced with a rebellion by workers, the UAW called the 20-hour walkout to regain control and try to shore up its credibility. The strike was ended before it became a substantial disruption to the assembly plants, which are dependent on parts from Nexteer. Workers were forced back to work without seeing let alone voting on a reported “new deal.”

This has left workers vulnerable to victimization. One of the terminated workers spoke with the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

“The company called me recently and said they were firing me for unsatisfactory work. I called them back and asked what was unsatisfactory, and they didn’t have an answer. I asked my supervisor and he said there was nothing unsatisfactory about my work. They’re making up BS to get people out of here. It’s because of the strike—they’re going to try to get rid of everybody they can right now.

“This is not the first scare tactics the company has pulled. First they passed out a letter saying we should scab, and now they’re letting a whole bunch of people go.”

The company says it is firing workers who have not

put in enough time to earn contractual protections, but many workers say the move is clearly retaliatory and suggest that the most outspoken workers are being targeted.

Another Nexteer worker said, “People are getting walked out of here this week. Someone was walked out of the plant today—he had only 30 days. It was said he was making negative comments on union sites.”

The victimized worker added, “The UAW just told me if you post bad things about the company on Facebook you can get in trouble. I said no, I haven’t bashed the company. I’ve only bashed the union!”

Though details are still emerging, there is a distinct possibility that the UAW worked with the company to finger workers and have them dismissed.

“Everybody posts bad things about the UAW on Facebook. It could very well be true that they’re firing people for saying bad things about the union. Is the union getting rid of people through the company? Are they telling the company ‘we don’t want this guy because he doesn’t agree with the UAW and the company’? I don’t know.

“You can’t fire somebody for going on strike. They can come up with a reason why and it’s basically in the union contract that they can fire you in the first so many days for whatever reason, but I have proof that my floor boss said I haven’t had scrap parts come back. I’ve gone above and beyond what a normal person would do so their reasoning isn’t going to work with me.”

He continued, “I see them using this against everybody because everyone is upset they’re walking people out. If they get our jobs back the UAW will say ‘were fighting for you’ to make it look like the UAW saved the day before they go on to sell us out again. It’s all probably part of their plan to earn them some

respect. There's a lot of pissed off members, and the union is probably in on it with Nexteer.

"The main thing we were trying to accomplish with this strike was that when we first went into contract talks, everybody agreed that we were not going to take any concessions whatsoever. We were told that the company wasn't asking for concessions. We were looking to come out of poverty level wages, and we were more or less just trying to tell Nexteer we were done playing their games. The UAW and Nexteer and the Big Three didn't want us to strike because we would have shut them down. We would have shut FCA [Fiat Chrysler] down and GM down.

"Now they walk out thirty people for no reason and all it does is put fear into everybody else. That's why they fired us, they're trying to put everyone into line and say you're either going to take what we give you or we'll fire you. There's a bigger plot behind all of this."

After repeatedly claiming that copies of the tentative agreement would be released imminently—and then giving lame excuses about technical difficulties with printing or converting it into a digital file—UAW Local 699 officials claim copies will be released today.

According to the Michigan Live news web site, UAW Local 699 President Rick Burzynski said, "The new tentative agreement includes most of the changes the membership wanted and addresses the main issues pertaining to wages, benefits and the cost of health insurance per member."

"Union leadership heard very loud and clear what the members wanted," he said.

This is a fraud. It is not possible for workers to wrench any significant concessions from the company on the basis of a bureaucratic stunt like a one-day strike. Lying by the UAW, along with the victimization of workers, is all part of the corporate-union conspiracy to push through the new pro-company deal.

For its part, the UAW has issued no statement about the firings and did not respond to complaints from workers for several hours. The union reportedly met with some of the victimized workers this morning, no doubt to tell them that any possibility of reinstatement depends on the passage of the new contract and the ending of their criticisms of the UAW.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* urges rank-and-file Nexteer workers to organize their own meetings,

independent of the UAW, to prepare a campaign now to defeat the contract. Workers should formulate their own demands and outline a strategy to fight for the broadest support from autoworkers and all workers for a genuine struggle against the auto bosses and their agents in the UAW. Among these demands must be the immediate reinstatement of the victimized workers and payment of all lost wages and benefits.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact