

Nexteer workers challenge UAW officials at contract information meetings

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16 December 2015

Nexteer workers grilled officials from the United Auto Workers with angry questions Tuesday as opposition continues against the second sellout deal pushed by the UAW at the former GM steering components complex in Saginaw, Michigan.

During the first three of six informational meetings, workers challenged UAW International and Local 699 officials who insisted nothing more could be gotten from the company, and that if workers rejected another tentative agreement the factory could close its doors.

Inside the plant, workers reported, UAW officials and supervisors were employing strong-arm tactics, particularly targeting those with the least seniority. Already dozens of workers with fewer than 89 days have reportedly been fired, including some who denounced both the company and the UAW on various social media sites.

Workers voted down the first UAW-backed deal by a resounding 97.5 percent on December 6. The UAW then called a bogus 20-hour strike on December 8 in an effort to corral resistance, before ordering workers back to their jobs without seeing, let alone voting, on a new deal. While claiming to have “listened to the membership,” the UAW brought back an agreement that contained all of the onerous terms of the first—albeit with a somewhat larger signing bonus and an upfront \$2 raise for the lowest-paid workers currently making \$12 an hour.

The joint effort by the company and the UAW to pressure and intimidate workers has failed to break their resolve, however, and there is widespread opposition to the deal, which includes near-poverty wages and long work hours, extra health care costs, the establishment of an industrial spy system and virtually unlimited management powers to victimize workers.

This was made clear in the comments made to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* by workers at the factory gate Tuesday and those attending the contract “roll-out”

meetings.

“The meeting was intense,” a young worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “there was a nice crowd and you could feel the mistrust with the company and the UAW.”

There were 15 pages missing from the contract the local union released on its Facebook page, he said. When challenged by workers, union officials claimed the problem was a “software glitch” and that they were putting up the missing passages. Workers are sure the UAW is concealing other information from them and were doubtful it had even reached an agreement when the UAW shut down the strike last week.

The main issues were pay and the abuse of the discipline policy, the worker said. “You shouldn’t have to choose between buying food and gas when you are working for a multimillion-dollar company. We produce steering components for cars and trucks that sell for forty or fifty thousand dollars, and we can’t afford to buy a vehicle.

“People jumping on the microphone also wanted to know about the discipline policy. They are already walking people out the door for two weeks over not having safety glasses and other things, without even a warning. The new contract will give management extra power to go nuts.”

He said that the joint health and safety committee comes out to the shop floor to look at a worker’s job and say what time it should be done in. “If they say it takes 34 seconds to complete your part, you have some manager who says, ‘I don’t care, you can do it in 17 seconds,’ and then an injury happens. A new person is always nervous about their jobs and will get hurt. They say you have to report to medical immediately, but if you do you are disciplined and treated like a leper.

“I hurt my shoulder and have gotten carpal tunnel on the job. They take you to the office, question you and find

any way to say it's not their fault. Then they say something like, 'You were supposed to do that with your right hand instead of your left,' and suspend you for three days."

The worker said the supervisors were "overstepping their boundaries," but if workers file a grievance with the UAW it takes 2-3 years to get resolved. "They have over 700 grievances now, and the union officials told everybody at the meeting that they are not doing anything until the contract is resolved."

A worker victimized last year for "unsatisfactory work performance" despite beating his production quotas told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, "I had words with the International rep. He said all grievances are on hold until the contract is accepted. There were nine of us who have been wrongly fired, and our grievances have been in the International's hands for more than a year. I said you weren't negotiating a contract last year why didn't you resolve it then. I'd be better off hiring a lawyer."

He added that the company is "constantly scrolling through Facebook because they don't want social media to know how they are treating their employees."

Another worker pointed out that one of the workers with less than 89 days who were fired for walking out with other workers on December 8 posted an appeal on Facebook for UAW committeemen to contact him and fight for his job. "Nobody called him," she said.

At the factory gate on Tuesday, workers welcomed campaigners from the *Autoworker Newsletter* who were passing out the issue featuring the article, "Ten facts autoworkers need to know about the Nexteer agreement." Many said they were regular readers and praised the newsletter for telling workers the truth.

A group of veteran Nexteer workers who worked at the plant complex when it was Delphi Automotive stopped to speak. The giant parts company, which was spun off by General Motors in 1999, declared bankruptcy in 2005, slashing thousands of jobs and imposing savage wage and benefit cuts with the backing of the UAW.

GM bought the steering complex back in 2009 before demanding even more wage cuts to attract a new buyer. In 2010, Beijing-based Pacific Century Motors (majority-owned by the Chinese state-run auto parts manufacturer AVIC Automobile Industry Holding) bought the Saginaw site, but GM remains its largest customer.

"They cut my pay from \$28 to \$16.50 an hour," said one worker. "Now the union is trying to scare workers making \$12 an hour by saying the plant will close if they don't accept the deal. It is not fair, and I hope workers

vote it down," she said.

Another worker with nine years said, "I read the *Autoworker Newsletter* all the time. It is enlightening. The two-dollar raise is ridiculous. The UAW is not telling us everything. I was glad that we went on strike and I got on the local news to say so. But they sent us right back to work and it made us look bad. I was saying we shouldn't go back without a vote.

"The UAW has got people scared. They say the plant is going to close if we vote this down. I worked at Eaton, and we accepted a pay freeze. Six months later they shut the plant anyway. So, I say let's fight, and if they close it, so be it.

Summing up the militant mood of workers at the informational meetings Tuesday, the above-mentioned young Nexteer worker said, "The trust is zero and the UAW is catching it right now. They are just trying to figure out how to get 51 percent to vote for this, they don't care how. If they wanted a landslide vote in favor they would have raised the wages and protected us from the supervisors. But that is not what they are looking for. If this contract passes it is going to cause workers to flare up.

"The union officials are saying 'How come people are reading the contract now, you haven't been reading them for five or six years. Why are you doing that now?' And we say: 'Well it's because people don't trust you. They are opening their eyes and asking questions. You guys caused this, and people want to gain knowledge.

"They are surprised about how many workers are fighting back. Ninety percent of workers don't trust the UAW. Workers have to start talking to each other and meet up to figure out what we can do to win what we need."



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