

Nexteer Automotive workers report arbitrary firings, harassment

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Workers at the Nexteer Automotive steering components plant in Saginaw, Michigan report widespread harassment and intimidation by management, abetted by the United Auto Workers (UAW), in the wake of their contract battle last year.

More than three months after the UAW shoved through a sellout contract many workers say they still have not received a copy of the agreement. In addition, workers report they have discovered that the contract contains concessions that were not disclosed by the UAW at the time of the ratification vote.

For example, under terms of the new agreement, workers who are laid off no longer get supplemental unemployment benefits that make up a portion of lost wages not covered by state unemployment benefits.

A Nexteer worker who asked not to be identified because of the danger of victimization told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “They have just stopped our third shift for assembly and put them all on first and second. My department, which always works seven days a week, was notified [that there would be] no more overtime except for a few people.”

The worker noted, “None of the UAW contract agreement is being followed. We also just learned since [the] contract was settled they took away our free life insurance policy and our sub pay. None of this was disclosed to us previously and we still have not received our copy of the contract. Nobody knows what’s really in it.”

Some 3,350 workers are employed at the Nexteer complex in Saginaw, which was originally owned by General Motors before being spun off to Delphi in 1999. After the Delphi bankruptcy the company was reacquired by GM in 2010 and then sold to Chinese investors from Pacific Century Motors.

Shortly after the UAW barely pushed concessionary agreements past 140,000 workers at Fiat Chrysler, GM

and Ford, workers at Nexteer rejected a UAW proposal by 97.5 percent on December 6, 2015. Following the rejection vote the UAW called a strike, but sent workers back to work after less than 24 hours.

The UAW then called a second vote on the basis of a new agreement that was largely patterned after the previously rejected contract. The deal maintained the two-tier wage system, under which new hires start at just \$13 per hour, and imposed an inferior health care plan. The agreement also enumerated a long list of infractions for which workers could be disciplined.

The UAW used blatant intimidation tactics to secure ratification of the deal, telling workers that the plant would close if they voted ‘no.’ Despite this, 39 percent of the workers still rejected it.

Once the contract was settled, Nexteer reported record 2015 earnings. Revenue was up 12.8 percent to \$3.36 billion and gross profit increased 29.7 percent to \$545 million.

The four-year agreements the UAW reached at Fiat Chrysler, GM and Ford retained the hated two-tier wage and benefit system while providing a miniscule increase for senior workers. The contract also sanctioned the outsourcing of jobs.

The consequences of this betrayal are already evident with Fiat Chrysler’s announcement it is ending small car production in the US and laying off 1,420 workers in the Detroit area.

It is now clear that the contract voted on by Nexteer workers was not a complete document. “Every few days they will send out a letter with new things they have come up with. For example, if you now come into the plant on your day off you get three points,” a worker with 10 years at Nexteer told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

“There is a lot of crazy stuff going on. People are being fired and written up. The UAW is not even trying to get them back.”

The worker said many workers were losing their jobs due to the point system established by Nexteer, where workers accumulate marks against their work record for certain infractions. “There are a lot of people out now,” the worker said. “It is mostly for points. If you come back a minute late from break they will give you points. You basically have to cover yourself.

“They don’t care if you’ve worked your butt off 12 hours a day, seven days a week, if you wake up late one day, you are fired. Then they put the point sheets up on the bulletin board so everyone can tell. There is no privacy.”

Another veteran Nexteer worker told the WSWS she had still not received a copy of the UAW-Nexteer agreement. “They keep on saying it is not finished,” she said. She reported that workers were only now finding out about certain changes to the contract.

“Some of the stuff people voted on they are taking back. They told us attendance would roll over to next year. Now they are saying it does not. We were supposed to have Martin Luther King Day off, but they turned it into a rotating holiday. You can’t use it during the week or you won’t get time-and-a-half for working Saturday.

“The company is doing whatever they want and the UAW lets them. You have to come to work and be quiet. If you are six minutes late they will give you three points, the same as if you missed a whole day.

“You have to know what is going on, or you could lose your job. Last month, they hired 100 people. That was in part to replace those that they had fired.

“A lot of people have been quitting who are fed up with the changes. The atmosphere has changed. The supervisors are constantly nit-picking with people. They will write you up for anything.”

She expressed particular anger at the role of the UAW. “You never see a UAW committeeperson. If you call them, they never come back and tell you what is going on with your issue. You have to hound them down. They are not fighting for you.”



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