

Nexteer Saginaw workers determined to vote down sellout UAW contract

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19 May 2021

We urge all Nexteer workers who want to fight the new sellout agreement to contact the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter for information on forming a rank-and-file committee.

On Tuesday, United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 699 posted a notice on its Facebook page announcing that the approximately 2,300 Nexteer Saginaw parts workers will vote on a second Tentative Agreement (TA) contract this Friday. The vote comes two and a half months after workers overwhelmingly rejected the first TA by a margin of 85 percent.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* issued a statement Monday urging workers to reject this sellout contract. Like the previous two concessions contracts in 2010 and 2015, the current proposal fails to restore sweeping wage and benefit concessions imposed since General Motors spun off its largest parts division more than two decades ago.

The agreement also increases workers' health care costs, maintains the hated multi-tier system, expands the pool of highly exploited part-time and temporary workers, and continues or expands all of the "flexible tools" used by the company to impose brutal working conditions. These include "Alternative Work Schedule" and "Critical Plant Status" provisions, in addition to mandatory overtime. The pro-corporate UAW has once again signed off on these sweatshop provisions.

Nexteer workers have expressed enormous opposition to any concessions, and to the all-too-familiar UAW-company efforts to bull rush and intimidate workers into voting for a company-dictated deal.

Comments by workers on social media overwhelmingly express skepticism and anger at how little information is being shared with the rank-and-file about the contract. "Same contract we voted down last month just sprinkled sugar on it" wrote one worker on Facebook.

Another Nexteer worker told the WSWS: "My vote is no. I'm definitely not happy with it. It's way too long of a period for these raises to make it worthwhile. It seems like people connected to the top are trying to make this deal seem more popular than it is, which is pretty shady."

Several workers have complained that they still have not received the full contract directly from the union. Many are reporting that they received the actual document only through an unofficial post on the "saginaw unions no holds bar" Facebook page. The same Facebook group, which is controlled by current and aspiring local union officials, this week took down WSWS

Autoworker Newsletter articles posted by members, and removed WSWS Labor Editor Jerry White from access to the page for opposing the censorship.

The union "rollout" of the latest TA is intended to divide and confuse workers in order to ram through the contract without allowing the workers time to read and discuss the 230-page document. If workers want to learn about the contract from the UAW, they have to go to meetings on company grounds, often during their own shifts. The union is deliberately seeking to divide the workers by holding multiple separate meetings for different classifications.

One worker's comment on the Local 699 public Facebook page is indicative of the anti-democratic and bureaucratic character of the ratification process. The worker wrote:

Big thumbs down. First off, where is the actual contract? I need to read it to make an informed decision otherwise that's an automatic No. Second, I didn't appreciate how the rollout was a sales pitch. I want to know the good and the bad. There was time for 3 questions in our meeting; not enough. Third, what's with the gimmicky incentives? "Dental and Vision for all current members" and whatnot. Umm, Did you forget that low seniority employees were permanently laid off? Sounds like the ones you brought back will be getting the boot again (or reduced to part-time) so no one even benefits from it. Lastly, Severance Pay has not been extended to all current employees. HUGE No for that.

Another worker told the WSWS, "Well, it'd be a 'no' vote for me, but I am on disability right now and don't have a car on Friday to get down there to vote against it. And they're only giving us this one day on short notice to vote. A lot of us don't live close to the plant—I drive an hour each way to work."

When asked about the "rollout" meetings, the worker commented, "Somebody told me that they couldn't even really talk or hear anything over the sound of the machines in the background at their meeting. It was a joke. They hold them at the plant, in front of management basically, because they want to hush people up, or figure out who's asking too many questions and go after them."

Nearly every page of the TA contains language that explicitly cedes “flexibility” to the company to exploit the workforce at will. The language is couched in the “Joint Activities” and “Team Concept” corporatist phraseology, which makes clear that things like overtime, health and safety, job security and all other workers’ basic needs are subordinated to maximizing the company’s profits.

It is not really a contract at all, because it explicitly allows the company, in agreement with the UAW, to impose new conditions based on changes in the market and the supreme goal of UAW-Nexteer to cut costs and increase profits.

For example, the contract states: “No provision of this agreement shall be superseded or changed other than by written agreement between the Company and the Union.” But since the “union” long ago ceased to represent the workers and is itself a business controlled by corrupt and bribed executives, any claim that the workers are consulted through the UAW is a fraud.

The contract includes a “No Strikes” clause. Under the category of “shop rules” it lists 38 violations for which workers can be sanctioned or fired, but no sanctions on the company for forcing workers to risk their lives in unsafe, coronavirus-infected plants.

The “Critical Plant Status” provision states that “the company may require employees of these critical plants or parts of plants to work mandated overtime for a period of up to 90 days.” The only proviso is that the “parties” [management and the UAW] agree.

Under the “Hours of Work” section, the company asserts that it will retain the ability to implement an “Alternative Work Schedule,” imposing up to 12-hour, seven-day shifts and abolishing overtime pay after eight hours.

The meager wage increases, which will purportedly bring most production workers to \$21.50/hour by 2026, will leave them well below the already inadequate pay level of their counterparts at GM and saddled with a poverty wage. There is a nearly two-year wage freeze in the middle of the contract for all production classifications, about which many workers have raised questions on social media.

With basic consumer prices already rising at the fastest rate in decades, and additional out-of-pocket health costs, workers in the end will continue to see their real wages stagnate or decline.

In addition, there is every indication that this contract will increase the number of temporary and part-time workers, whose wages are comparable to those of fast-food workers and who have virtually no benefits or rights.

Regarding the wage increases, one worker told the WSWS:

We should really be fighting to get back all of our COLA decreases. I started in 2009 at \$14.40, and this got kicked down to \$14 right away in the 2010 contract. Well, I have been here 12 years now and I am making \$17.70. The new wage may help a little. I’m sure a lot of newer hires will feel they have to take it, but it won’t be enough especially in 2026. It just keeps getting worse and worse. I took this job because all the jobs in my smaller town an hour away dried up. But now a job at Taco Bell or the new Cheese Factory in the area seems as good or better, and I don’t

have to drive two hours.

These conditions are the outcome of decades of global economic decline of American capitalism, deindustrialization and ever more criminal financial speculation, made possible by the suppression of the class struggle by the unions. But the union officials have further enriched themselves through “joint” union-management slush funds, positions on corporate boards and outright bribetaking and embezzlement of union dues.

Bureaucrats like UAW Regional Director Steve Dawes, who makes over \$174,000 a year, are paid to sell this rotten contract on behalf of the company to workers who struggle to make ends meet and are constantly victimized by management.

One worker told the WSWS:

They raised our dues from 2 hours to 2.5 hours [25% increase] out of each check during this contract, and we basically only went on strike once, for like 15 hours, and that was in 2015. Meanwhile, I can see on that expenses sheet that they sent around that they spent like \$130,000 dollars on restaurants and busing people to sports games. Is that why our dues went up? Because it doesn’t seem like it was to prepare to strike.

It is critical that workers take the conduct of the vote into their own hands. The full contract must be posted and made available to all workers, and sufficient time allotted for them to study and discuss the provisions before any ratification vote. Attempts to conduct contract discussions either on the plant floor or by separate departments should be rejected. Rank-and-file workers must be empowered to monitor the vote process and halt any attempt by the UAW officials to rig the vote or stuff the ballot boxes.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* urges Nexteer workers to form a rank-and-file committee to take contract negotiations out of the hands of the UAW bureaucracy and advance the struggle for the livelihoods of all autoworkers and the working class across the world.



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wsws.org/contact