

Nexteer workers defy UAW intimidation on eve of vote on sellout deal

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20 May 2021

This week, several “rollout” meetings were held by the United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 699 on the most recent Tentative Agreement (TA2) for approximately 2,500 Nexteer auto parts workers at the former General Motors plant in Saginaw, Michigan. The proposed contract is widely recognized by workers as a repeat of a rotten deal rammed through by the UAW in 2015 after a strike that lasted less than 24 hours. An effort by the UAW to push through a prior version of the deal was defeated by 85 percent in February of this year.

The purported purpose of the meetings was to give workers information about the agreement in advance of the vote, which is being conducted today between 4 a.m. and 8 p.m. However, many workers reported that they were not even provided with the full, 230-page contract document. Instead, a vague, three-page “highlights” summary, which sugarcoats the agreement, was released to the membership while the full agreement was only leaked in a private online forum.

Several Nexteer employees reported to the WSWs that the meetings were a farce where little or no information was provided. In many cases, UAW officials tried to intimidate workers who challenged them. Speaking about a meeting on Wednesday, one worker told the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*, “First off, they held these meetings in the plant as opposed to the union hall, which meant that nobody could ask any questions without management being there to oversee. Secondly, the machines were still running while the meetings were going, so nobody could hear anything. I saw a guy raise his hand and tell the union rep that he had been standing there for 20 minutes and he couldn’t hear a single word of what he was saying.”

Another Nexteer worker gave the following account.

“The rollout meeting was a JOKE. We could barely hear anything and there was time for only two questions. One of my co-workers approached the bargaining chairman and asked a question about the new classifications. Then, the chairman told him to ‘shut the f[***] up’ not once, but twice, and gave him the finger. When he told the other union rep standing there that he wished to document the chairman’s harassment, she simply shook her head and walked away.

“The union reps are even trying to stop people from discussing the details about the contract online,” the worker continued. Referring to the Facebook online discussion forum “saginaw unions no holds bar,” from which the WSWs’s material was removed this week, the worker said, “I saw that workers’ posts have been being removed from Facebook. I believe one of the admins of the ‘no holds bar’ group is on the UAW electoral board, so he could be in the union’s pocket. I saw someone posted a poll trying to tally who was voting ‘no’ and who was voting ‘yes,’ and they removed it. It’s all very shady. They’re desperately trying to control this conversation.”

Another employee denounced the contract, which introduces a “Semi-Skilled” classification of employee. The categorization would create a layer of essentially low-paid apprentices on the shop floor who would be used to siphon off as much work as possible from the higher-paid skilled tradesman. This is a component of a broader attempt by the company to carry out a sweeping attack on the workforce, further casualizing the workforce and shifting health care costs onto the employees.

“I really hope this contract gets shot down. I’m a ‘no’ vote for sure. While it tries to make it look like there are more opportunities for in-house employees,

actually it pits specialized and general workers against one another, driving the price of all labor down. Every employee loses out on this deal in the long run because while the unskilled workers might have the chance to earn a bit more, they won't make nearly what they deserve, and it'll be a fraction of what they're currently paying out to the journeymen."

He continued, "Our union has absolutely no backbone. Paying dues to them is literally like giving a donation."

Another worker spoke to the WSWS on the contract. "I am definitely voting no, and I think it is going to be a close vote. I know a lot of people who are planning to vote no. The biggest issue for me is that they want to hire part-timers who will work 30 hours a week.

"There will be 334 part-time workers who will be in a special classification. A lot of the newer people say they are just going to lay off those who were recently hired to be replaced by the part-timers. One reason they want this classification could also be that the company will save money because that group will not get the health insurance. They have to pay out of every check for it.

"The union is telling us that with the new part-time hires the company won't have to go into 'critical' status, which means that the company can enforce mandatory overtime. They claim we won't lose overtime if we want it, but we will not go critical—that is, we won't be forced into overtime so much. A handful of the legacy workers who are left now make the \$23.50. By the end of the contract, they expect everyone will be at \$21.50 except, of course, those part-time workers!"

The worker continued, "Then there is the whole issue of the onsite medical. They are trying to get us to leave our own doctors by offering several perks if you go to the onsite medical clinic. I really don't want such a personal thing as going to my doctor being done where I work. I have a pretty good doctor now, and a long relationship, but I want my privacy.

"When it comes to COVID infections in the plant, they hypocritically take the opposite approach. While they're trying to get everybody to go to an onsite doctor, when someone tests positive in the plant, they won't tell you who it is because of privacy concerns! They don't let you know when someone around you has had it, and there is no special sanitizing and

disinfecting.

"I have been here more than a decade. The union is telling us to vote for the contract. They say 'Oh, this is the best contract ever.' I have to say things have really changed. Once I was so happy and proud to be a union worker. But now the union is letting the company get away with anything. I am really disgusted.

"I think it would be a good thing to have something new, independent committees. I would like to see that happen. I would be a part of that. The union is like a business, everything for the company"

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* urges Nexteer workers to follow the example of the Volvo Truck workers in Virginia who have formed the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee to provide a voice for workers and create a fighting organization to defend their interests against the corporations and the company-controlled UAW. To get more information about building a Nexteer rank-and-file committee, e-mail autoworkers@wsws.org or go to www.wsws.org/workers.



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