

UAW announces narrow ratification of sellout contract at Nexteer, fueling rank-and-file suspicions of ballot-rigging

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Late Friday night, UAW Local 699 posted a one-sentence announcement on its Facebook page stating that workers at Nexteer's parts complex in Saginaw, Michigan had ratified a tentative contract in balloting conducted in the course of that day.

Workers at the plant had voted down a previous tentative agreement by a margin of 85 percent to 15 percent in February. The nearly 2,500 workers at the plant had been working without a contract since the previous agreement expired in March 2020.

Opposition to the new contract had been steadily mounting in response to the anti-democratic and bureaucratic procedures employed by the union to ram through the deal. The anger of the workers only increased when, just days before the ratification vote, the union published a three-page "highlights" designed to conceal the pro-company terms of the agreement, which nevertheless made clear that it failed to address any of the workers' demands.

When the actual 230-page document was posted by a Facebook group not officially aligned with the union, opposition increased. Many workers accessed the statements and analyses posted by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* to get the truth about the contract.

The day and time of the vote were announced by the UAW only three days in advance and limited to a 14-hour window that ended at 8 p.m. local time, before many workers got off from a 2 p.m.-10 p.m. shift.

The Local 699 announcement of the results, posted within two hours of the end of voting, claimed that the second tentative contract had passed by a margin of 52 percent to 48 percent. It provided no additional information. No actual numbers were given. There was no report on the turnout. The vote by the skilled trades workers was not given, nor was there any other breakdown by job classification or wage tier.

As of this writing, the union has provided no further information on the ratification vote.

Elsewhere, on a private Facebook group page, a rank-and-file worker reported that the skilled trades workers had voted down the contract by 54 percent to 46 percent.

The agreement, worked out behind the backs of the workers between the company and its corporatist UAW partner, is another concessions deal dictated by Nexteer. The two parties agreed to increase the signing bonus in an attempt exploit the economic distress of the low-wage workforce, intensified by the pandemic, to help impose the agreement. The deal also includes an increased cash incentive to switch from PPO to HMO health coverage and a token reduction in points assessed for alleged violations of plant rules.

On all of the vital issues concerning the workers, the contract either maintains the status quo or makes things worse:

- There is no restoration of wage cuts from previous contracts, particularly the 2010 and 2015 contracts. Wage increases stipulated over the course of the five-year contract will still leave the vast majority of workers at poverty-level wages. Most production workers will max out at \$21.50 an hour in 2026.

- The number of temporary and part-time workers at the plant will increase, further pitting workers against each other and expanding a hyper-exploited layer of workers in the plant. The hated tiered-wage system will continue, with even more tiers added.

- Pressure will be increased to switch from the more flexible PPO health care program to the more restrictive HMO. Workers can either save costs by accepting more restricted access to health care or pay more out of pocket to keep the PPO.

- Management's option to impose a grueling Alternative Work Schedule or invoke "Critical Plant Status" is maintained, along with mandatory overtime, which have already destroyed the eight-hour day.

- Every section of the contract is loaded with corporatist language on the need for "management flexibility," making a mockery of the entire agreement, since management is ceded the "right" to impose changes it deems necessary to maximize market share and profit. The only proviso is that the UAW, the direct agent of the company, sign off on the changes.

Workers have every reason to question the vote and should consider the so-called contract illegitimate. What is necessary is

that they take the initiative into their own hands and establish a rank-and-file committee independent of the pro-company union to serve as the genuine voice of the workers. The first item of business of this committee will be to demand an audit of the ratification vote count carried out under the supervision of rank-and-file workers.

No contract negotiated behind closed doors between the company and its bought-off union stooges can be considered legitimate.

Many workers have denounced the anti-democratic methods employed by the union and raised doubts about the legitimacy of the vote count on social media and in comments to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*.

"I've been outspoken about it. I don't like the contract and I don't know if I can trust the vote results," one production worker told the WSWS. "I've been here nine years and things have gotten steadily worse. This contract gives back everything we gained in the last one, especially on part-timers. It allows them to expand the part-timers in order to divide us and force out the older workers."

Another worker commented, "I'd say it was 50/50. The way they did the roll-out was weird. It was very secretive. You can't trust the UAW."

Anger at both the voting procedure and the contract itself were reflected on the Local 699 public Facebook page as the results were posted.

"I want a recount," commented one worker. "[N]o way this passed. What a crock of s***... No different than working at McDonald's."

Another worker commented, "Bulls***. Didn't even give B-shift a chance to vote after work. I sure as hell wouldn't have been able to go before."

Many workers said they could not even get down to the union hall to vote on Friday, adding that in most cases that they would have voted "no."

"Y'all going to regret voting yes to this contract" was the most "liked" worker comment on the UAW Local 699 public Facebook page.

"Roll out" meetings called by the union in advance of the vote were a total farce, held on the shop floor and divided by plant and classification. As reported earlier by the WSWS, at some of these meetings UAW committeemen shouted down and cursed at workers who asked questions. Workers could barely hear what was being said due to the noise from machines. Whatever was said was within earshot of management, potentially setting critical workers up for victimization. In many cases workers got to ask only three or four questions.

Current and aspiring union officials who run the "Saginaw union no holds bar" Facebook page censored all postings by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* and removed WSWS Labor Editor Jerry White from the page after he challenged the anti-democratic practice.

On Friday, WSWS reporters distributing copies of the *Autoworker Newsletter* calling for a "no" vote on the contract were confronted by Local 699 President Tom Hurst, who at one point threatened to call police.

A worker cited above also told the WSWS, "If it passed, it's because workers got tired after waiting over a year for a new contract. The union was not going to call a strike, so workers figured they would just have to live with it."

There was no discussion of a strike by the UAW at any point before or during the contract negotiations, and workers are still angered by the "Hollywood" one-day strike called by the UAW in 2015, when workers were pressured into accepting a sellout contract almost as quickly as they were pulled off the picket line.

"There's no union," the worker said. "They are bought and paid for, in the company's pocket. Some workers said that the bargaining committee was getting paid for a twelve-hour day every day during contract negotiations." He added that what the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* said about the pro-company role of UAW Local 699 was "spot on."

It is critical that Nexteer workers take the lead from Volvo auto workers in Virginia, Faurecia auto parts workers in Indiana and Michigan, Amazon workers in Baltimore, and educators' rank-and-file committees across the country and begin to form an independent committee as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Workers, through their own committee, should formulate their own demands, based not on what the company says it can afford, but on their own needs. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* suggests that these demands include:

- Restoration of all previous wage cuts and contract concessions, particularly in the 2010 and 2015 contracts.
- All temporary and part-time workers be hired as full-time workers at the same wages as all other workers.
- Further expansion of health care coverage at a reduced cost.
- And end to the tier system, the Alternative Work Schedule, and Critical Plant Status.

We encourage all Nexteer workers who are interested in forming a rank-and-file committee at the plant to contact the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* by writing to autoworkers@wsws.org today.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact