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Nexteer workers in Saginaw, Michigan voice support for Volvo strikers

WSWS reporting team
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A *World Socialist Web Site* Autoworker Newsletter reporting team spoke to workers at Nexteer Automotive about the ongoing strike by 3,000 Volvo Truck workers in Dublin, Virginia.

Workers at Nexteer in Saginaw, Michigan, who build steering systems for General Motors and other automakers, had a sellout contract pushed through last month by the United Auto Workers without adequate discussion and over massive rank-and-file opposition.

Following the contract vote on May 21, UAW Local 699 at Nexteer posted an announcement that the tentative agreement, containing major concessions, had passed by a narrow 52-48 percent margin. No further breakdown of the vote has been released, leading many workers to demand a recount or audit of the votes.

In typical fashion, the UAW refused to release the full contract language to Nexteer workers, releasing only self-serving highlights.

Nexteer workers stopped to speak to WSWS reporters while leaving their shift Thursday afternoon.

Workers expressed solidarity with the Volvo truck workers, who twice voted by 90 percent margins against sellout contracts the United Auto Workers attempted to ram through. The Volvo workers resumed strike action June 7 amid a news blackout by the national news media. For its part, the UAW has not even reported the strike on its national website, demonstrating its hostility to the workers who stood up against its attempted sellout.

A worker who preferred to remain anonymous said, “I think what’s happening in Virginia is great, as long as they stay together. If they actually win, that’s going

to be a big win for all of us.”

He added, “It seems like ever since I got here in 2006, we’ve been giving back and losing things every contract. It seems like they do what they want every year.”

The worker reacted to the sentencing of former United Auto Workers President Gary Jones, who was sentenced last week to 10 to 28 months in federal prison for embezzling up to \$1.5 million in UAW funds collected from workers’ dues. Jones used the money to finance golf trips, private Palms Springs, California villas, and lavish meals for top UAW executives. Jones was only the most recent of a parade of UAW executives to face prison time for corrupt activities while in leadership positions.

“It seems like it’s everywhere in the UAW. They definitely need to clean house. Jones should’ve gotten more time. He’s got to pay all this money back, but they’ll never see it. He should’ve gotten more jail time.”

Anthony, a younger Nexteer worker, said he’d heard about the strike at Volvo and the role of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), which workers have been talking about at the Nexteer plant. The VWRFC, which workers organized with the assistance of the WSWS, has sought to keep workers informed throughout the contract battle and to spread word of the strike to other sections of workers across the US and internationally.

When a WSWS reporter explained that the UAW brought back a sellout contract to shut down the first Volvo strike last April, Anthony laughed and said,

“That sounds real familiar.” Several other workers at Nexteer said essentially the same thing, with the common sentiment being that the UAW had sold out their recent contract struggle.

Asked for his thoughts on the VWRFC, Anthony commented, “I like what they’re doing down there. We definitely need that here. Like you say, you see what just happened to us, pretty much the same thing. They go in there and negotiate, it’s like they aren’t negotiating for us. They’re going for the company, they’re not really thinking about us.”

Commenting on the drawn-out, secret negotiating process at Nexteer, Anthony stated, “Everyone was saying, ‘We know they had this all planned out. There’s no way you guys sit back almost a year and a half and weren’t thinking about all this. They said they had to have personal meetings, and we all said they should be doing open Skype calls for us to see. We know it’s a big run-around, and we definitely need something like the Volvo committee in here. That would be a great change.’”

A half shift axle worker wrote to the WSWS, “Tell them to hang in there for the long haul and don't give up or cave in like we did at Nexteer, and wish them the very best success.”

A Nexteer worker posted on Facebook in response to the WSWS report on the Volvo strike, “Good for them. They did what they needed to do--at least their members stick together.”

Another wrote, “They did right. Too bad these people didn't think they deserved more here at Nexteer,” and another said, “Very inspiring and lucky they have so much opposition to their contract.”



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