

# “A slap in the face”: Nexteer workers denounce sellout contract ahead of vote Wednesday

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A new tentative agreement for Nexteer workers in Saginaw, Michigan, contains sweeping concessions, particularly on pay for new hires and out-of-pocket benefit costs. The sellout agreement is producing tremendous anger among workers at a key node in the global manufacturing network of the auto parts industry.

Details of the agreement have been explained in a leaflet being distributed by workers titled “Concessions our Leadership fails to tell you.” According to the leaflet, the deal creates a new layer of “third class employees” among new hires, who would be placed on a sharply reduced wage structure.

Production workers hired under the new contract would start at \$19.05 an hour, compared to \$22.50 for current hires and \$24.75 for “legacy” workers hired before May 24, 2021. Even after four years, wages would rise only to \$20.89, an increase of just 9.7 percent.

Real pay would be further slashed by steep increases in out-of-pocket healthcare costs. Beginning next year, workers in married households hired after May 2021 would see their weekly contributions more than double, from \$26.50 to \$53.34 for a married couple with children. When dental and vision coverage are included, total weekly contributions would reach \$66.34.

The agreement also imposes punitive attendance policies. Attendance points would be reduced from 18 to 12, while the penalty for an hour absence would double from one point to two. New hires would be barred from using accrued sick time until after 120 calendar days on the job. The policy would also count against FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act), the

federally mandated leave for family and medical reasons.

“The TA is a slap in the face to the workforce,” one young worker told the WSWS. “They may as well dress up like Marie Antoinette and sing ‘let them eat cake.’”

A worker with more than two decades of seniority told the WSWS: “All kinds of promises were made to us. Everything was a lie. In 2006 we took an \$8 per hour pay cut, virtually lost our pensions. Our \$50,000 buydown was cut to \$36,000 after the UAW took their cut and Uncle Sam got his cut. I have a thick skin because we have been lied to so many times by the UAW.”

Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker running for UAW president, issued a statement calling on workers to reject the contract and organize to impose rank-and-file oversight over the vote. “There must be vigilance against any attempt by the Local 699 bureaucracy to ram through this deal. In 2021, they declared a deeply unpopular contract ratified by a narrow margin without even releasing a detailed vote breakdown.”

This is a reference to the 2021 vote in which the UAW claimed the contract was ratified by a 52–48 margin. The result drew widespread suspicion from workers, many of whom called for a recount. Meanwhile, Local 699 President Tom Hurst was quoted by local media at the time as calling the “ratification” “a big relief for the bargaining committee and all of the staff at the union.”

Lehman concluded, “Workers must organize rank-and-file oversight of the ballot to ensure its integrity and to enforce the democratic decision of the membership. If the contract is rejected in a free and fair

vote, then a strike must immediately be called.

“The union apparatus has repeatedly used every trick in the book to manufacture its desired outcomes in votes,” he continued. “At Mack Trucks, where I work, in 2023 we were forced to vote again on a contract we had rejected by 73 percent, only for the bureaucracy to claim it passed by 93 percent the second time.”

Lehman called on workers to “use [their] collective strength” to take the “initiative out of the hands of the apparatus and form new organizations—rank-and-file committees—composed of and accountable to the workers yourselves. These committees can ensure the integrity of the vote, oversee the counting process, provide a platform for genuine discussion, and prepare for strike action under the direct control of workers.”

He explained that an appeal must be made to workers across the United States and internationally, adding that “if Nexteer workers take a stand, it will resonate widely with [Big 3] workers.” He also pointed to a rising wave of strikes, including by auto parts workers in Findlay, Ohio, and throughout Mexico.

For many years in the mid-20th century, parts workers had maintained wages close to parity with those in the assembly plants. However, in recent decades they have been driven down to near sweatshop levels. The spinning off of in-house parts operations into nominally “independent” contractors has been a central mechanism through which automakers have slashed wages and conditions.

Nexteer itself emerged from this process. It originated as part of Delphi Corporation, which was spun off from General Motors in 1999. After Delphi declared bankruptcy, GM repurchased key operations in 2009. With the help of the UAW bureaucracy, management shed \$6.2 billion in pension liabilities and imposed massive wage cuts, with hourly pay slashed from \$26–30 to as low as \$10–14. During the four-year bankruptcy process, the workforce collapsed from 50,000 to just 14,000. Nexteer was then spun off again and sold to a Chinese firm less than a year later.

The cost of the electric vehicle transition, combined with far lower than expected sales, is now being imposed on workers. At major automaker factories, thousands of jobs have been eliminated, beginning shortly after the UAW secured ratification of what it called a “historic” contract in 2023. Among parts workers, the impact is even more severe, as automakers

shift losses onto the backs of suppliers.

“This resurgence of class struggle is colliding with the entrenched power of the union bureaucracy,” Lehman explained. “From the national headquarters—misnamed ‘Solidarity House’—down to the local unions, the apparatus operates as a dictatorship, beyond the control of the rank and file, while officials draw millions in income financed by workers’ dues.

“I am running for UAW president to abolish this bureaucracy, which has betrayed workers for decades. My campaign calls for workers to take back the union by replacing the existing hierarchy with a network of rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled from the shop floor. If elected, I will not take up a position in Solidarity House but will remain a worker on the shop floor.”

He concluded: “This campaign is about building a movement, not reshuffling positions at the top. The critical issue is not what I will do but what you will do. Forming a rank-and-file committee at Nexteer is a decisive step in building this growing rebellion from below.”



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