

# After massive no vote, UAW extends Nexteer contract behind backs of rank and file

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United Auto Workers officials in Saginaw, Michigan, have kept 1,300 Nexteer Automotive workers on the job nearly two weeks after workers overwhelmingly rejected a concessions-laden contract pushed by the UAW International and UAW Local 699.

After workers rejected the deal by 96.2 percent, union officials conspired with management behind their backs to extend the previous five-year agreement. When pressed by workers why a strike had not been called, UAW officials said it was “illegal” to walk out under the terms of the contract.

According to a post on the UAW Local 699 Facebook page, the 2021 contract was extended “indefinitely” on April 2, the very same day workers decisively defeated the UAW-backed tentative agreement. This was carried out without any membership meeting, discussion among workers, let alone a democratic vote by workers. The union bureaucrats have such contempt for workers that they did not even bother to provide an excuse for trampling over the democratic rights of the workers they claim to represent.

The rejected contract would have created a new layer of “third-class employees” among new hires, who would start at \$19.05 an hour—compared to \$22.50 for current workers and \$24.75 for legacy workers hired before May 2021. After four years, wages for new hires would rise only to \$20.89. The deal would have also sharply increased out-of-pocket healthcare costs for workers hired after May 2021, with weekly contributions for a married couple with children more than doubling from \$26.50 to \$53.34.

The extended 2021 contract maintained starting wages barely above \$16–\$18 an hour and imposed years-long “progression” to inadequate top rates, all

while inflation is steadily eroding purchasing power. Workers rejected that framework then, and they have rejected it again today.

In a cynical maneuver, union officials circulated a survey for workers to list their most pressing demands, echoing UAW President Shawn Fain’s bogus claims that the “membership has the last word.” In fact, everything the union apparatus has done since the resounding defeat of its pro-company contract has been against the rank and file, not corporate management.

This demonstrates the long-proven fact that the UAW bureaucracy cannot be pressured into changing its ways or reformed. It must be abolished and power and decision-making transferred from the union apparatus to workers on the shop floor.

The determination of the bureaucracy to block a strike is a back-handed acknowledgement of the immense power of Nexteer workers. If workers truly had no leverage—as the UAW bureaucrats claim—there would be no need for such extraordinary efforts to suppress their actions.

The reality is that Nexteer workers occupy a critical choke point in the North American auto industry and beyond. The steering systems produced in Saginaw are essential components in some of the most profitable vehicles on the road, including the Chevrolet Tahoe, Suburban and GMC Yukon, as well as major pickup trucks like the Ford F-150, GM’s Sierra and Silverado and the Dodge Ram. If Nexteer workers were to strike, key plants in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Texas and Kentucky could quickly grind to a halt.

This is precisely what the union apparatus is working to prevent. The pattern is not new. In 2015, workers overwhelmingly rejected a concessions contract and launched a strike, only to have it shut down in 20 hours, with workers sent back on the job without even voting

on a revised agreement. In 2021, workers again voted down a contract by a wide margin but were kept on the job while a slightly modified deal was pushed through. Today, in 2026, the same methods are being used once again: isolate the workers, block strike action and impose a pro-company contract.

The conditions for a unified struggle by auto parts workers to win back decades of UAW-backed concessions have never been better. In the coming weeks and months contracts are expiring for thousands of workers at American Axle, Dana, Bridgewater Interiors and other auto suppliers.

At the same time, rising fuel prices due to Trump's criminal war against Iran and the relentless attack on social programs to fund militarism, is triggering mass opposition from working people against both corporate-controlled parties.

The struggle at Nexteer is at a critical turning point. Everything depends on the initiative of rank-and-file workers. A rank-and-file committee, made up of the most militant and trusted workers, can provide the means to enforce the will of the membership. Such a committee would insist on the basic principle that a contract rejected by workers cannot be imposed, and that "no contract, no work" must be upheld in practice, not just in words.

The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* suggests that rank-and-file workers conduct their own poll, using available telecommunication apps, to measure the support for a strike. The UAW bureaucracy has not even bothered to conduct a formal strike authorization vote because they know there is overwhelming support for such a fight. A vote organized by rank-and-file members can also veto the undemocratic decision to extend the contract behind their backs.

With the mandate of the membership, workers must make immediate preparations for an all-out strike. A rank-and-file committee can outline the demands that workers must achieve before any ratification vote. That includes abolishing all tiers and establishing equal pay for equal work on the basis of substantial wage increases to make up for years of lost income due to UAW concessions and inflation.

Other demands should include: full cost-of-living protections, the defense of healthcare benefits without increased costs to workers, and an end to forced overtime schedules that dominate workers' lives. In

addition, workers must have real job security, including protections against layoffs and outsourcing, which are constantly used to blackmail workers into accepting concessions.

The \$800 million-plus strike fund controlled by the apparatus must be used to sustain workers for a determined strike. This means doubling the strike benefits and ensuring healthcare coverage until the struggle is won.

At the same time, workers must have full access to all bargaining information, with no more closed-door negotiations or last-minute contract dumps. Any agreement must be subject to thorough review, discussion and a genuinely monitored vote conducted under the supervision of rank-and-file workers, not union officials.

The struggle at Nexteer cannot be fought in isolation. The same issues confronting Nexteer workers—low wages, tiers, speedup and the suppression of opposition—are faced by autoworkers throughout the United States and internationally. The global nature of production means that the fight must also be global.

Nexteer workers should appeal directly to workers at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis plants, as well as to parts workers across the supply chain, calling on them to refuse to handle scab parts and to support any strike action. At the same time, connections must be built with workers in Nexteer facilities in Mexico, Canada, Europe and Asia, countering the company's attempts to shift production to lower-wage regions.

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