

Mack Truck worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president Will Lehman urges “No” vote, calls on autoworkers in US and internationally to support a Nexteer strike

Mass opposition among Nexteer workers to second sellout tentative agreement

Our reporters
8 May 2026

To contact or join the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee, fill out the form at the end of this article.

Nexteer workers in Saginaw, Michigan, are determined to vote down a second pro-company tentative agreement (TA) handed to them by the UAW Local 699 leadership just five weeks after they rejected an initial TA by 96.2 percent on April 2.

Workers see the new deal, whose terms were posted Thursday night, as essentially no different from the one they rejected: Another sellout that locks in poverty wages, expands the tier system and hands the company unchecked control over speedup and discipline on the shop floor. Both newer hires and veterans who have lived through round after round of concessions have come to the same conclusion.

The near-unanimous rejection of the original TA should have been a mandate for a strike. Instead, the UAW International and Local 699 conspired with management to prevent one. On the same day the workers voted the TA down, union officials extended the 2021 contract indefinitely without a membership meeting, without a discussion and without any vote by the workers who were bound by it. When workers asked why no strike had been called, they were told by union officials that it was “illegal” to walk out.

The union bureaucracy could not be more transparent. Extending the contract served no other purpose than to protect Nexteer’s production, maintain the supply chain to the Big Three and give itself time to work out another deal with management behind closed doors.

On May 1, the bargaining committee announced it was “pleased” to have reached a new TA. The terms of this TA, outlined by the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee in a statement published Thursday, confirm that it is a rehash of what the workers had already rejected.

Starting pay remains at a poverty wage of \$19.50. Production workers with at least 24 months on the job will reach a top rate of \$27 an hour at the end of the contract, the same wage Delphi Saginaw Steering workers earned in 2005. That would be worth \$45.65 today.

The nominal wage increase of \$1.43 upon ratification, with a mere \$1 an hour increase per year through 2030, will be virtually wiped out by annual inflation running at 4 percent. Under the new TA, workers can expect to be in a worse position in 2030 than they are in 2026.

The new TA is in certain respects worse than the original. It introduces a “grow into” period for new hires: Currently employed workers will need 24 months to reach full production wage, while workers hired after the contract is ratified must wait 48 months. This is essentially an expansion of the hated tier system. The union and the company have thrown in a one-time \$2,000 ratification bonus and a \$3,000 grievance settlement as an incentive for cash-strapped workers unable to make ends meet due to the previous betrayals of the union bureaucracy.

A ratification vote on the TA is scheduled for May 14, 2026, at the UAW Local 699 union hall. In the meantime, beginning May 8, contract “rollout” meetings are being held in the plant, not the union hall, which underscores the lineup of the company and the union bureaucracy against the rank-and-file workers.

One Nexteer worker told the *World Socialist Web Site* that workers are “beyond frustrated” with the union. “We feel our union has sold us out over the last 15 years of contracts with nothing but concessions under the guise of helping our company prosper,” he said. He added that Local 699 was interested only in supporting Nexteer and its shareholders, and the international union was concerned only with continued production at the Big Three.

Thad, a newly hired worker, said:

If we can’t afford to buy the vehicles that we’re making, who’s going to buy them? Nexteer has plants in Mexico and in Poland. That’s kind of the company’s game, is to play the US workers off the Polish workers off the Mexican workers and vice versa. It’s just a game of seeing how far down they can smash wages between the workers.

I think the contract that they have for Saginaw sucks. I

think we can do better. I feel if we don't stand strong on this we're going to lose ground. I feel that we need a strong show of support here to get this straightened out and get this plant back on track.

Will Lehman, a Mack Truck worker in Pennsylvania and rank-and-file, socialist candidate for UAW president, issued a statement urging a "no" vote on the TA and the building of the rank-and-file committee at Nexteer to take the contract talks out of the hands of the bureaucrats and prepare for a strike. He said:

Brothers and sisters at Nexteer, and autoworkers everywhere:

I stand in complete solidarity with the 1,300 workers at Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan. Your 96 percent rejection of the first UAW-backed sellout contract was a historic act of defiance. It sent a message that workers will not accept poverty wages, expanded tiers and speedup disguised as a contract.

The new tentative agreement expands the tier system for new hires, locks in poverty starting wages of \$19.50 an hour, extends the contract an additional nine months to squeeze workers longer and surrenders all shop floor control over line speed. A one-time ratification bonus of \$2,000 does not change what this deal is: a sellout. Vote "no."

But a no vote alone is not enough. In 2015 and 2021, the bureaucracy stalled, extended contracts, applied pressure and forced revotes until they got what management wanted. They will do it again unless workers take power into their own hands. That is why I urge every Nexteer worker to join the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee—to dismiss the bargaining committee, take control of negotiations and organize an all-out strike on terms set by workers, not the apparatus.

No more 20-hour farce strikes called and canceled by Solidarity House. No contract, no work. A real strike at Nexteer—which produces critical steering components for GM, Ford and Stellantis—can bring Big Three assembly lines to a halt within days under just-in-time production.

I call on every parts and supply worker, every assembly worker at the Flint Truck, Dearborn Ford and Stellantis plants and every autoworker in Mexico, Canada and around the world: Refuse to handle scab Nexteer parts. Honor the picket lines. The companies are organized globally—workers must be as well, through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

The sweatshop conditions workers endure at parts and supply plants did not happen by accident. They were imposed over decades by the UAW bureaucracy in partnership with the Big Three and the government—a deliberate strategy to divide assembly workers from parts workers and weaken the entire working class. That division must end.

I am running for UAW president at the head of an insurgent rank-and-file slate because the bureaucracy cannot be pressured or reformed—it must be abolished. Power must be transferred to workers on the shop floor, organized in independent rank-and-file committees in every plant. That is the purpose of this campaign, and it is what the fight at Nexteer is making concrete right now.

The Nexteer workers are on the front line of a struggle that belongs to the whole working class. Stand with them.

Vote "no." Join the Rank-and-File Committee. Prepare to strike.

The Nexteer Rank-and-File Committee reaffirms the following demands:

1. Abolition of all tiers: equal pay for equal work;
2. Immediate and substantial wage increases which exceed the rate of inflation, with full cost-of-living adjustments;
3. A livable starting wage and rapid progression to top pay;
4. Full healthcare coverage for all workers and their families, with no increased out-of-pocket costs;
5. Enforceable limits on overtime, speedup and scheduling abuse;
6. Job security for all workers and anti-outsourcing protections;
7. Workers' control over safety and staffing;
8. Explicit and enforceable prohibitions on cycle-time surveillance and the use of tracking data for discipline.

The committee calls on all Nexteer workers to vote "no" on May 14, to organize on every shift and every department and to build the Rank-and-File Committee as the true representative of Nexteer workers. It calls on workers at General Motors, Ford, Stellantis and across the auto parts supply chain in the United States, Canada, Mexico and internationally to stand with Nexteer workers and refuse to handle parts produced while Nexteer workers fight for a decent contract.



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