

Nexteer auto parts workers condemn new tentative agreement

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10 May 2026

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Nexteer Automotive workers in Saginaw, Michigan are preparing to vote on Thursday, May 14 on a second tentative agreement (TA) negotiated by United Auto Workers Local 699. In April, the workers rejected the first TA by a massive margin of more than 96 percent, one of the most decisive contract rejections in recent labor history.

The reaction to the new deal from the shop floor is broadly one of anger and disgust. Workers who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* this weekend left no doubt where they stood.

Five weeks ago, rather than acting on the membership's mandate and fighting for a pro-worker contract, UAW Local 699 officials extended the existing agreement without so much as consulting with the workers. Their main concern was to prevent a strike, which they said would be "illegal."

This is under conditions where other parts and supply companies, including American Axle, Dana, Bridgewater Interiors and Magna, are facing contract expirations, and a shutdown of production of Nexteer's steering components could quickly bring the Big Three assembly plants to a halt. Precisely because Nexteer workers are in a powerful position to reverse decades of concessions and give-backs, the company stooges who run the UAW, at both the national and the local level, are conspiring to block a strike and impose new attacks on the rank-and-file.

After conducting further closed-door meetings with management, they have returned with a deal that in several respects is worse than the first. Workers who have examined the new TA say management and union officials are misrepresenting its most basic terms to the

membership. "They're telling everyone they get \$5,000 (in a one-time signing bonus) when that's not true," one worker said. "That only goes to those hired before 2019. But they're not telling people that. Those hired after 2019 only get \$2,000."

The union bureaucrats are also touting a separate \$3,000 grievance settlement which will go to each worker. This, however, is no bonus. It is a payment the company is obligated to make to compensate workers after management illegally opened the contract to give skilled trades a raise without giving production workers anything. The union is falsely presenting this payoff as a benefit of ratification.

The new TA would retain poverty wages, starting at \$19.50 an hour. It would also expand the tier system. Workers hired after ratification would face a 48-month "grow into" period before reaching top pay, as compared to the current 24-month period.

Nexteer has deployed a computer tracking program to monitor "cycle time," which measures to the second how long each worker takes to complete each task. Workers report being pressured to hit cycle times of 28 to 30 seconds.

One worker described the cycle time as "horrible," adding that "For 57 to 59 minutes every hour you are moving as fast as you can, destroying your body." The worker continued:

New hires will get a warning and after so many times they get fired. Those who've been there a while will get put on notice. But it does take time to hit these cycle times. Yes, we have breaks at certain times. But if it's not your break time, for 57 to 59 minutes you have to move as fast as you can. You cannot by any

means slow down the line.

UAW Local 699 began holding rollout meetings on Friday to present the new TA to the membership. Workers who have studied the document say its structure is intentionally designed to prevent scrutiny. One worker explained: “It says Section A has changed, and the only way to know what Section A is, is to have the old TA to compare it to the new TA.”

In a statement issued last week (“Vote ‘No’ on the new sellout contract! Join the Rank-and-File Committee to prepare strike action!”) the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee said:

A strike at Nexteer would send shock waves across the entire industry and create conditions for hundreds of thousands of autoworkers in the US, Canada, Mexico, and internationally to take up the same fight. Under just-in-time delivery, our strike could halt production across GM, Ford and Stellantis within days...

The UAW bureaucracy agrees that the company should have complete control over line speed. There is nothing in this TA that prohibits Nexteer from using cycle-time data to discipline workers, eliminate jobs, and drive up the pace of production. Any minimal wage gain is undercut by the union-backed “right” of the company to sweat more production from fewer workers in less time.

The statement continued:

The bargaining committee must be dismissed and replaced by a committee of trusted rank-and-file workers chosen by us, accountable to us, negotiating in the open, and on terms drawn up by us.

The rejection of this contract must mean the beginning of a strike. No return to endless extensions of the existing rotten contract so the union and the company can claim it is illegal for us to walk out while the company builds up

stockpiles.

No contract, no work! Strike pay of at least \$1,000 a week.

It is not a question of pressuring the bureaucrats to do better. The solution is to remove them from control and replace them with independent rank-and-file power on the shop floor. That is the purpose of the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee, part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee is raising the following demands:

- Abolition of all tiers;
- Immediate substantial wage increases that exceed the rate of inflation, with cost-of-living adjustments;
- A livable starting wage and rapid progression to top pay;
- Full healthcare coverage for all workers and their families;
- Enforceable limits on overtime, speedup and scheduling abuse;
- Job security and anti-outsourcing protections;
- Workers’ control over safety and staffing;
- Explicit, enforceable prohibitions on the new cycle-time surveillance or the use of tracking data for discipline.

The WSWS calls on all workers to fight to win these demands by joining and helping to build the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee.



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