

# Three Rivers American Axle workers vote 98 percent to authorize strike

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Nearly 1,000 workers at the American Axle plant in Three Rivers, Michigan, (which changed its name to Dauch Corporation in January of this year) voted by 98 percent on Monday to authorize a strike if no agreement is reached before the current contract expires on May 31.

The overwhelming strike vote came three days before workers at Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan, were slated to vote on a second tentative agreement (TA) negotiated by UAW Local 699. On March 31, the Nexteer workers voted down the first TA pushed by the UAW bureaucracy by more than 96 percent.

Contracts at a number of parts and supply companies in addition to American Axle and Nexteer expire this month, including Dana (4,000 workers in four states), Bridgewater Interiors in Lansing and metro Detroit (2,200 workers) and Magna seating in Highland Park (900 workers).

Strikes at Nexteer and American Axle 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, these parts strikes could halt production across GM, Ford and Stellantis within days.

In 2008, the UAW colluded with American Axle to slash wages at the Three Rivers plant from \$29 an hour to \$14.50. UAW officials, including Region 1D Director Steve Dawes, isolated the workers during an 87-day strike and forced through the massive concessions contract.

Eighteen years later, wages top out at \$22 after a five-year progression, a figure that, adjusted for inflation, represents roughly half of what workers were earning before 2008. Over the past decade, American Axle has generated \$8.4 billion in profits. The company's CEO

has been paid \$111 million. The top five executives have collected nearly \$231 million in combined compensation.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* reported in March, workers at the Three Rivers plant have taken the measure of the bureaucrats at both the local and national levels. As one worker told the WSWS, "We have no faith in our local. We have to fight our own battles."

The situation at Nexteer shows what workers at American Axle can expect from the UAW leadership. The UAW Local 699 officials responded to the massive "no" vote on the initial TA by extending the existing contract without even consulting the membership and resuming closed-door talks with the company, while telling the workers a strike would be "illegal."

After five weeks of further negotiations, they returned with a second deal that workers on the shop floor are condemning with equal force. "They've been deceptive as f—k," one Nexteer worker told the WSWS. "The whole bargaining team is crooked, along with the Region 1D guy Jason Tuck."

Union officials are presenting a \$3,000 per worker grievance settlement as a benefit of ratification and suggesting that failure to pass the new TA will jeopardize the settlement. In fact, the company is legally obligated to pay workers the settlement after management illegally reopened the existing contract to give skilled trades a raise while leaving production workers behind.

The contract roll-out presented to workers by the union bureaucracy buries the fact that new-hires, post-ratification, will face a 48-month progression to top pay rather than the current 24 months, a dramatic expansion of the tier system. The roll-out literature falsely boasts of the "continued elimination of wage groups" and

declares: “No more divide and conquer!” According to Nexteer workers, the materials also omit any reference to the nine-month contract extension, pushing the agreement’s end date from March 2030 to December 2030.

A Nexteer worker described conditions on the shop floor:

Since I’ve been here, many two-man jobs have been reduced to one man, and many jobs have been replaced with robots. There are signs throughout the plant saying “Vote No” that people hung up. In my personal opinion, the contract is garbage.

At Dana’s Warren, Michigan plant, worker Kamara Bond was fired twice for reporting deadly conditions, including chemical phosphate exposure, oil spills and a co-worker’s suspicious death, while UAW Local 155 collaborated with management to bury her grievances. With Dana’s contract expiring May 22, her message to workers is: “If the union won’t lead it, let the workers do it themselves.”

UAW President Shawn Fain held a theatrical rally in Three Rivers in March alongside Democratic Party politicians. Fain was a national UAW negotiator during the 2009 restructuring that devastated workers’ lives. As union president, he oversaw the 2023 “Stand-Up” strike strategy that kept a large majority of plants working.

The lesson of every major parts industry battle of recent decades—from the 2008 American Axle strike to the 2021 Dana fight, where workers rejected a sellout contract by a nine-to-one margin only to have the UAW and United Steelworkers return with an essentially identical deal—is that the bureaucracy will seek to negotiate terms of surrender rather than terms of victory.

The WSWS and the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee call on workers at American Axle in Three Rivers to form their own rank-and-file committee, independent of the UAW apparatus, accountable to the membership and organized to fight.

Such a committee at Three Rivers, working alongside the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee and

counterparts at Dana and other parts plants, would be able to coordinate action across plants and prepare a unified strike. The slogan must be: “No contract, no work!”

The demands are straightforward and non-negotiable: full recovery of wages lost since 2008, with cost-of-living protections going forward; abolition of all tiers and a rapid, equal progression to top pay for every worker regardless of hire date; enforceable limits on speedup, cycle-time surveillance and line-speed manipulation; full healthcare coverage; real job security against automation and outsourcing.

*Please fill out the form below if you are interested in building an autoworkers rank-and-file committee.*



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