

# Nexteer worker on sellout tentative agreement: “Everybody wants a strike because right now we’re in control”

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Workers at the Nexteer auto components plant in Saginaw, Michigan, are voting today on the second sellout tentative agreement brought back by United Auto Workers Local 699 and the UAW International bureaucracy. On March 31, the workers rejected in a landslide 96.2 percent vote the first deal reached between the UAW officials and the company.

A “no” vote on the new TA and strike by the 1,300 Nexteer workers could spark a mass movement of auto parts workers and galvanize production workers at the Big Three factories. Nexteer supplies steering components and other parts that are essential to the production of some of the most profitable auto and truck models at General Motors, Ford and Stellantis, as well as companies based outside of the US. Under the “just-in-time” delivery system, key parts and supplier strikes can quickly shut down assembly lines.

A number of major auto parts and supply firms have contract expirations in the coming days. On Monday, workers at American Axle’s Three River, Michigan, plant voted by 98 percent to authorize a strike; and Dana, Bridgewater Interiors and Magna Seating have expiring contracts. Among the workers there is explosive anger over concessions and layoffs alongside soaring company profits and disgust over the betrayals of the UAW bureaucracy, beginning with UAW President Shawn Fain.

The union bureaucrats responded to the mass repudiation of their collaboration with Nexteer by extending the old 2021 contract behind the backs of the rank and file, claiming a strike would be “illegal” and returning to closed door talks with management.

The first TA deepened the system of tiers, with new-hires slated to start at the sub-poverty wage of \$19.05

an hour, compared to the poverty wage of \$22.50 for current workers and \$24.75 for legacy workers hired before May of 2021. After four years, wages for new-hires would rise only to \$20.89. The deal 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.

On May 1, the union announced a new TA that is in some ways worse than the previously rejected contract. It adds a new “grow into” period for new-hires. Current new-hires will be required to work 24 months, and workers hired after ratification will be required to work 48 months before reaching the full production wage scale. Starting pay remains at \$19.50. The full rate for production workers after four years will be \$27 an hour. This is the same wage that workers, who worked at what was then called Saginaw Steering under GM spinoff Delphi, made more than 20 years ago. In terms of purchasing power, that wage would be worth \$45.65 an hour today.

Assuming annual inflation of 4.0 percent, the paltry wage hikes in the new deal will be virtually wiped out. The contract does nothing to prohibit Nexteer from using its computerized cycle-time system to discipline workers, eliminate jobs and drive up the pace of production.

The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee is calling for rejection of the new TA and strike action under the principle of “No contract! No work!” Solidarity House’s \$850 million strike fund must be used to provide strike pay of at least \$1,000 a month.

The rank-and-file committee is calling for the dismissal of the bargaining committee and its

replacement by a committee of trusted rank-and-file workers chosen by and accountable to the shop floor workers. It is also calling for coordination with autoworkers across the US and internationally, including parts workers with expiring contracts, to honor Nexteer picket lines and refuse to handle scab parts. This is part of a fight to abolish the union bureaucracy and place power in the hands of the rank-and-file workers.

Beginning Friday, May 8, UAW Local 699 held contract “roll-out” meetings in the plant. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to a 20-year veteran worker about the fight to reject the latest sellout and carry out a strike under rank-and-file control.

She said, “I’m voting ‘no.’ I mean, everybody wants this strike because right now we’re in control. ... We’ll hit them right away, right in the gut.”

She said that only some 30 workers were at her department’s contract roll-out meeting out of the hundreds who could have attended. “Basically, the second agreement is just like the first,” she said. “They didn’t add more money, they just took money off of the end and added it to the beginning.

“I make \$24.45, and I’ll go up to \$26 something. You do all the overtime just to get to \$60,000.”

Speaking of the role of the union officials, she said, “We get threatened in a way at our meetings.” Their line to the workers is, “Just be careful. Be careful what you vote for. You don’t want to go any further. You don’t want to bring arbitrators in.”

In this they echo management. The worker said the plant manager met with workers prior to the first TA and said, “If this doesn’t go through, the plant could close because they’re not making enough money. And I’m like, ‘bull crap.’” She added, “All management keeps saying, ‘You guys are going to close the building if you strike.’ That’s what they all say.”

As for the mood among the workers at the roll-out meeting, she said, “Everybody was ticked. Everybody left ticked.” Workers were particularly outraged by the attempt of union officials to blackmail workers into accepting the new TA with the threat of withholding a \$3,000 per worker grievance settlement if the contract was not passed.

Local 699 and Nexteer are seeking to exploit the financial desperation of workers—created by previous union-backed concessions—by including a \$2,000

signing bonus in the package, as well as the \$3,000 grievance settlement. The grievance concerns the company’s reopening of the current contract to grant a raise only to skilled trades workers while excluding production workers.

The worker explained that at the roll-out meeting, “Everybody was ticked about the grievance because somebody said that \$3,000, if we turn the contract down, it goes away. If you sign this, we’ll give you your grievance, basically. How does that work? Either you settled or you didn’t.”

**The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee is advancing 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 committee is calling on all Nexteer workers to fight to win these demands by joining and helping to build the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee.



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