

Workers at Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw reject second sellout contract by 73 percent, call for strike action to win their demands

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Are you a Nexteer worker? Fill out the form at the end of the article for information on joining the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee.

Workers at parts supplier Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan decisively voted down a second sellout tentative agreement Friday. According to United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 699, the contract went down by 73 percent to 27 percent. Production workers voted down the contract by a resounding 76 percent. Skilled trades workers also rejected the contract.

The contract rejection is a major victory for rank-and-file workers and represents a repudiation of the UAW bureaucracy that negotiated the sellout, which betrays the workers' fundamental demands. The rejection took place in the face of fear-mongering and lies by local union officials, who falsely claimed that a strike would be "illegal" and suggested that workers could lose their jobs if they voted "no."

The deal was in many respects worse than the contract the workers rejected by more than 96 percent on March 31. It contains an expanded "grow in" period for new-hires, who would have to work 48 months before reaching the full production wage, while starting pay would remain at \$19.50. Out-of-pocket health costs for workers hired after 2021 would rise sharply. Under conditions of soaring inflation, the full rate for production workers after four years would be \$27 an hour, what workers at the plant made when it was called Saginaw Steering under the General Motors spinoff Delphi more than 20 years ago.

Local UAW officials have been thrown into crisis by the contract rejection. A local official hung up the phone when asked by a *World Socialist Web Site* reporter to comment on the vote.

Workers at Nexteer are in a powerful position. The 1,300 workers produce steering components and other parts that are essential to the production of very profitable vehicles at General Motors, Ford, Stellantis and other auto companies. Under the "just-in-time" delivery system, a strike by Nexteer workers or workers at other key parts suppliers could quickly shut down auto production lines.

The contract struggle at Nexteer takes place alongside a

growing tide of militancy among auto parts workers, with contracts at several important parts suppliers expiring. Workers at American Axle voted by 98 percent to grant strike authorization Monday, while workers at Dana, Bridgewater Interiors, and Magna Seating face imminent contract expirations.

A strike by Nexteer workers could galvanize workers across the auto parts industry in a common fight against poverty wages and abusive working conditions.

Will Lehman, a rank and file Mack Trucks worker from Macungie, Pennsylvania who is running for UAW president issued the following statement on the rejection vote by the Nexteer workers:

I welcome the courageous vote by Nexteer workers and call on all UAW members to support their fight against the conspiracy between the company and the UAW bureaucracy. What is happening at Nexteer is not unique. We have all seen these betrayals before. It is time to draw lessons. We can't keep moving in the old way. We have to act in our interests independently without being told what we can and cannot do by the UAW apparatus.

GM, Ford, Stellantis and Mack workers who were sold out in 2023 recognize what is happening at Nexteer, and we have to give our brothers and sisters an understanding of what UAW President Fain is capable of doing to sell us out behind all the phony claims of "historic gains" and UAW "reform." We are not going to win until we take an independent path, study the history of the past struggles of the working class, and apply these lessons now. If we don't fight now there will be nothing left to fight for.

I call on workers to join and build the Nexteer Rank-and-File Committee and raise the following demands:

- No contract, No work! No arbitration! No extensions. Immediate strike action to win workers' demands. \$1,000 a week strike pay

- Replace the current bargaining committee with a committee of trusted rank-and-file workers chosen by and accountable to the shop floor workers

- Coordinate with autoworkers across the US and internationally, including parts workers with expiring contracts, to honor Nexteer picket lines and refuse to handle scab parts.

I further call for:

- * A living 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 cycle-time surveillance or the use of tracking data for discipline.

A WSWS reporting team spoke to Nexteer workers Thursday while the contract ratification vote was in progress. Sentiment for rejection of the contract and a strike to win workers' demands was overwhelming.

Nate, a veteran Nexteer worker, said:

Everyone I talked to says this contract is worse than the first one. You are going to give us a dollar raise over four years and gas is already \$5 a gallon? We can't afford that. How are we supposed to get to work?

People feel like we come here, we work, we do what you tell us to do and then you say that you made this money these couple years, but you don't want to give that money to workers.

Then they say, "We don't care about you workers, we will replace all of you."

Some new-hires come in the door and after four hours say, "I can't handle this," and quit. And I've been there 19 years and you want to give me a dollar raise over four years? That is nothing to look forward to. I might as well work at McDonald's. In fact I feel like McDonald's and Taco Bell are giving out better incentives than what I'm getting.

When WSWS reporters pointed out that parts workers used to earn pay roughly equal to the Big Three, Nate said, "My sister used to work here and my dad used to work here, so yeah, they used to make better money."

Other workers expressed similar sentiments. There was particular anger over the treatment of new-hires, who would be required to start at the poverty pay rate of \$19 per hour and take

four years to work up to standard scale. On top of that, new-hires would have to pay more than double for health insurance.

Chris, a young worker with two years, said:

I hate seeing how workers are treated. This has to stop. I'm 100 percent behind this [rank-and-file committees], because if no one does anything, it's going to stay the same. Someone has to step up.

Now is the time to vote "no," strike, and stick together to get this done. Let's get our fair share. I know for a fact if we stopped work for a day they would be hurting. People need to realize the power they have.

Without us they are nothing at all. It doesn't matter if you are black, white, girl, boy... without us working they can't do anything. It is time now for us to stop feeding the rich, stop these bonuses for the higher ups... these Christmas parties they get while we're sitting there working nine hours six days a week, breaking our bodies just for them to tell us it is not enough.

It has to stop. It really has to stop, and we need to stick together now more than ever while we have the power. We need our fair share immediately, now, not later, not two years down the line. Not, "Let's negotiate for another year." But now!

There's no way this contract should have even been brought to us. And the scare tactics of losing insurance, that's all BS. They're trying to scare people into voting "yes." No one should vote "yes." If we strike for one day they're hurting critically. GM's losing so much money. So you think that we should just take this ***** contract for five years, not even four, but five? It's ridiculous.

We need a rank-and-file committee immediately. At Nexteer, the bargaining committee is hand-picked. There's a lot of yes men, there's a lot of people in management's pockets doing things that benefit them. That has to stop. We need some people working for the workers, not working secretly with management or trying to tell us this is the best you are going to get. That's not true at all.



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