

Widespread support for walkout as Nexteer workers force UAW to hold strike vote: “The ball’s in our court now”

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

Workers at Nexteer Automotive’s Saginaw, Michigan plant cast ballots Wednesday in the first day of a two-day strike authorization vote, with results expected shortly after voting closes Thursday morning. The vote comes after the 1,300-member workforce rejected two consecutive UAW-backed tentative agreements—the first by 96 percent on April 2 and the second by 73 percent in mid-May—and forced UAW Local 699 to hold a strike authorization vote against the clear resistance of the union apparatus.

Workers speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site* outside the local union hall expressed overwhelming support for a strike and denounced union officials for collaborating with management to intimidate workers with threats over the economic cost of a strike to their families, even as supervisors and union officials probed for divisions among the membership.

After the first TA was rejected, the Local 699 leadership extended the 2021 contract indefinitely behind the backs of the membership, without a meeting, discussion or vote and told workers a strike was “illegal.” After the second rejection, the UAW International and Local 699 were forced to call a membership meeting on May 17.

At that meeting, Jason Tuck, a UAW International servicing rep with a salary of \$148,476 in 2025, cursed the workers, threatened them with the closure of the plant and walked out mid-meeting when the membership made clear they would not be intimidated. Tuck was previously the Local 699 bargaining chairman and headed up the negotiations that led to the concessionary 2021 contract.

During the meeting, a worker put forward a motion to hold a strike vote and workers overwhelmingly backed it, forcing the union to schedule the vote.

The veteran worker who called for the strike vote at the Sunday meeting spoke to the WSWs outside of the union hall on Wednesday. He said:

This is the result of the 2008 financial crisis. All the Big Three spun off their parts suppliers. Ever since we’ve been working for wages we can’t live with. I came here in 2006. We won’t accept any more concessions. We can’t continue to accept being second-class union members.

Everybody here wanted a strike. It was a resounding “yes” to have a strike vote. Nobody said no. The International Rep Jason Tuck needs to grow up. We shouldn’t have to accept that from someone who is supposed to help. He was the bargaining chair in 2019, and after that he got a promotion to the UAW International.

“We’re stuck between those who have the money and the power,” he added, before a UAW Local 699 official tried to prevent him from continuing to speak to the WSWs reporter. He then challenged the bureaucrat, saying, “I can talk to whoever I want. It’s called free America,” whereupon the union official scurried away.

The worker concluded, “We got corruption in Washington today too. We have a president who is setting up a slush fund for people who rebelled against the country.”

A young worker denounced the effort by union officials to discourage workers from speaking to WSWs reporters. He said:

I don’t know what’s wrong with them. That’s showing the pressure they’re under now. All day today, top managers were calling these little meetings with some older workers and one of the union officials. They were asking what do you guys want in the next TA?

Well, that’s fine and dandy, but it’s too late. You’re only saying it because we’re literally voting on a strike today. That’s the only reason you guys are asking. What do we want, or what do you think we want? It’s too late for negotiating now. The fact that we have to twist your arm into negotiating lets us know we just need to strike.

In response to the strike vote, UAW Local 699 officials posted a letter on the union’s Facebook page that stated:

Just a reminder that we are still under an extended contract following our 2021 CBA. Please come to work, do your job the best you can, and continue to build quality parts for our customers.

A strike authorization vote does NOT automatically get us to walk and strike. It’s our way of showing management that we are willing and prepared to do so if they fail to negotiate a fair contract.

The bargaining committee is continuing to talk with management and will update everyone as information becomes available.

A young worker denounces the statement, saying:

That’s a lot of bull crap, you know. We need to strike soon. That’s the whole point of the strike vote is we’re letting you know

we're ready to strike. We are going to work tomorrow and going to figure out what the next step is because if everyone wants to strike and if it's a resounding "yes" vote, we're not just going to sit here and keep working on this contract and let you keep bullshitting us around. You're making us work the weekend and we're ready to strike. Now the ball's in our court, and it's time for them to feel what we've been feeling for the past 4 or 5 years.

He continued:

Some departments usually run 80 parts a day, and they're pushing it past 120, even though it's been so hot in there these past few days. They claim they're behind production quotas, but they just want to stockpile for an inevitable strike. I don't know how they get away with this. Our union is literally useless.

Workers have endured more than two decades of unrelenting concessions since General Motors spun off its Delphi parts division in 1999 and the Saginaw plant was sold off and renamed Nexteer Automotive in 2010. The cost-of-living escalator was eliminated. Healthcare costs rose sharply. A multi-tier wage structure condemned newer hires to poverty-level pay.

Under the second tentative agreement rejected last week, new-hires would start at \$19.50 an hour and reach the full production rate of \$27 only after 48 months. That full rate is the same wage workers earned when the plant was still called Saginaw Steering under Delphi more than 20 years ago. Had wages kept pace with inflation, workers would be earning over \$45 an hour today.

"Every contract, we lost something"

One veteran worker, who started at the plant when it was still operating as GM Delphi and watched it pass through several name changes—GM Holding Co., Newco and finally Nexteer, said that in every contract negotiation over that span something was taken away. Shift premiums went first, then paid holidays. At one time, workers had a two-week paid shutdown. Then the pay was stripped, and eventually the shutdown itself was eliminated. Workers were told each time to hold on, that conditions would improve when the company did better. They did not.

He was equally blunt about the union leaders overseeing the negotiations. "They get retirement homes in Black Lake," he said, and officials like Tuck and UAW President Shawn Fain collect between \$100,000 and \$275,000 "before kickbacks."

He added that when workers confront union officials about specific commitments made at the bargaining table—improvements to buydown arrangements, pay protections for job transfers—the response is a blank denial. "I don't remember that," they say. "Yes, you do," he replied. "You said it."

Another veteran worker said he had simply never been able to get union representation when he asked for it. "It just seems like nobody's fighting for us," he said. On hearing Tuck's compensation figure for the first time, he made an immediate connection: "Now I see why he walked out. He was mad because we didn't vote that crappy contract in."

A fourth-generation Saginaw autoworker described a union coordinator going around the plant in the days before the vote alongside management, asking workers what it would take to vote "yes" on a third tentative

agreement, while simultaneously trying to persuade them that \$500 a week in strike pay would be impossible to live on. The worker recognized this as a coordinated effort to divide and demoralize the membership. "It's the tactic of the union," she said, "to scare and divide us."

"How can you live on \$19 an hour for two years?"

The urgency workers expressed over wages and tiers was immediate and personal. A young worker who voted "yes" for the strike described watching what happened to workers at the bottom of the pay scale. Starting at \$19.50 an hour—with a 48-month progression before reaching the top production rate—new hires are effectively made disposable. He was direct. The company, he said, plans to terminate these workers before they hit the wage threshold, then cycle in replacements, and is ultimately moving toward reliance on temp agencies. "The UAW has done nothing for us," he said. "Operators need livable wages."

A veteran worker who had spent years at the plant put the cost-of-living crisis in concrete terms. Gas is running \$5 a gallon, he said. Premium fuel for his truck runs \$6, and filling the tank costs \$120. Housing costs continue to rise. On the wages Nexteer is offering, he said, "It's definitely a struggle."

These are workers producing steering components for the Chevrolet Silverado, the GMC Yukon, the Ford F-150, the Ram 1500—vehicles that sell for upward of \$60,000—and they cannot afford to fill the tanks of their own trucks.

He also raised the broader situation facing workers at other parts suppliers—Dana, Magna, American Axle, Bridgewater—all with contracts expiring in the coming weeks. His appeal was direct: "Stay strong and bond together. It's going to have a good outcome if we do."

A young worker made a similar point about the tier system's logic. "These private equity companies take over corporations and drive them into the ground," he said, "and the problem is the union is against us."

The rank and file must take control

Under just-in-time delivery conditions, a Nexteer strike could rapidly shut down production across General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis facilities throughout the Midwest and beyond. That is precisely what the UAW bureaucracy is working to prevent.

The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee has called on workers to deliver a strong strike authorization vote and, crucially, take the next step: the immediate formation of a rank-and-file strike committee, elected from trusted shop floor workers, to set a concrete walkout deadline and enforce it. The current bargaining committee—which produced two sellout agreements and has sought at every stage to suppress workers' resistance—must be replaced. Negotiations must be carried out openly, before the membership, with no more closed-door sessions whose results arrive as a *fait accompli*.

When asked what he thought about rank-and-file workers taking direct control of the strike and the negotiations, a veteran worker's answer was brief and to the point: "It'll be a lot better."

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