

# UAW presidential candidate Will Lehman issues letter to Nexteer workers: Prepare for strike action

Our reporter  
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Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file socialist candidate for UAW president, issued a statement this week calling on Nexteer workers in Saginaw, Michigan to immediately prepare and launch a strike following their overwhelming strike authorization vote.

“The ball is in your court now. Do not give it back,” Lehman wrote in the statement, posted on his campaign website. He praised workers for rejecting two UAW-backed tentative agreements—first by 96 percent and then by 73 percent—and for forcing a strike authorization vote that the apparatus was determined to prevent, culminating in an 86 percent strike mandate, including 89 percent among production workers.

Lehman warned workers to reject any attempt by UAW Local 699 and the UAW International to use the strike vote as a pressure valve while continuing production. He pointed to the Local 699 Facebook message telling workers to keep reporting to work and stressing that a strike authorization vote “does NOT automatically” mean a strike—a statement Lehman described as “management’s voice wearing a union jacket.”

In his statement, Lehman argued that the bureaucracy’s call for “14 more days” to reach a deal is aimed at weakening workers’ leverage by giving Nexteer time to build inventory and the Big Three to cushion production disruptions. “The UAW is not using your strike authorization as a weapon against management,” he wrote. “It is delaying action and buying time for management while pretending to fight.”

Nexteer workers voted to authorize a strike after the 1,300-member workforce repeatedly defied the UAW

apparatus. Following the rejection of the first tentative agreement, Local 699 extended the 2021 contract indefinitely behind the backs of the membership, told workers a strike was “illegal,” and tried to block a strike vote until workers forced the issue at a May 17 meeting. At that meeting, UAW International servicing representative Jason Tuck—who previously chaired bargaining for the plant—cursed workers, threatened closure, and walked out when he failed to intimidate the membership, which then compelled the union to schedule a strike authorization vote.

Lehman’s statement places the Nexteer contract fight in the broader historical trajectory of concessions imposed throughout the auto parts industry. He noted that parts workers once earned wages closer to Big Three assembly workers, but that the wage gap widened as the UAW apparatus isolated and defeated parts struggles during the 1980s and later paved the way for the spinoff of Delphi and the destruction of jobs, wages and pensions. He cited the tier system forcing workers to start at \$19.50 and take four years to reach \$27—essentially the same as what workers earned more than two decades ago under Delphi—and noted that if wages had kept pace with inflation, workers would be making “more than \$45 an hour today.”

Central to Lehman’s appeal is the call to take control of the struggle out of the hands of officials. He urged workers to form an elected rank-and-file strike committee “composed of trusted workers from the shop floor and accountable only to the membership,” empowered to set a concrete strike deadline, oversee all information related to negotiations, and prevent any further closed-door agreements presented as a fait accompli.

Lehman also raised an immediate financial demand: \$1,000 per week in strike pay from the UAW's strike fund. "At current living costs, \$500 a week is not meaningful strike support," he wrote, calling it "a mechanism for weakening workers' ability to sustain a struggle."

Addressing the company's threats to shift production to Mexico or Poland, Lehman emphasized international solidarity, rejecting nationalist competition. "Mexican workers are not your enemies. Polish workers are not your enemies," he wrote, calling for workers to link up across borders through rank-and-file committees and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

Lehman appealed directly to autoworkers at GM, Ford and Stellantis to honor Nexteer picket lines and refuse to handle scab parts, and urged parts workers at American Axle, Dana, Magna and Bridgewater—whose contracts are approaching expiration—to build rank-and-file committees.

Lehman concluded by tying the fight at Nexteer to the broader struggle over who controls production and society. "This struggle is about more than one contract," he wrote. "It is about who controls the workplace, the union and ultimately society itself—an apparatus tied to management and the political establishment, or the workers who create all wealth."



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