

UAW Local 699 rushes through third sellout deal at Saginaw plant

## “People on the shop floor are saying, ‘Hell no’”: Nexteer workers denounce third UAW-backed agreement

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*Fight the sellout! Join the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee by filling out the form below.*

Workers at the Nexteer Automotive plant in Saginaw, Michigan are outraged over the third attempt by the United Auto Workers bureaucracy to ram through a pro-company contract. Rank-and-file workers defeated two previous UAW-backed deals in April and mid-May—the first by 96 percent, the second by 73 percent—and then forced the union to hold a strike vote, which workers approved by 86 percent.

But less than 48 hours after the results were announced, UAW Local 699 officials declared they had reached a new tentative agreement (TA) late Saturday night. According to a post on the local union’s Facebook page, the deal will be brought before the membership for a ratification vote starting Thursday morning.

In a display of utter contempt, the union has released no details of the deal except a one-page wage sheet. New hire starting wages remain at the poverty level of \$19.50 upon ratification. The princely sums of \$0.04, \$0.08, \$0.21 and \$0.17 an hour are added to the yearly raises above the previously rejected deal.

Production workers, currently paid \$21.50, will receive a \$2.50 an hour raise to \$24.00 at ratification. This is sweetened from a \$1.43 an hour raise to \$22.93 an hour in the previous deal. Wages will rise to \$25.00, \$25.50, and \$26.25 in 2027, 2028 and 2029.

Both the new and the old deals, however, arrive at the same \$27.00 an hour in the final year. That is less than what workers at the Saginaw Steering plant, the predecessor facility, were making before GM spun it off in 1999, leading to the establishment of Nexteer in 2010.

The new TA followed immediately upon the UAW International breaking its silence on the Nexteer workers’ rebellion. A social media post about the strike vote claimed the 1,300 workers would walk out if the company failed to

produce a deal they would ratify. It was a ruse—a cover for hatching a new sellout that is little more than a rehash of the two agreements the membership has already rejected.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with a veteran Nexteer worker—referred to here as Marsha, to protect her from retaliation—about the new contract and the fight workers must mount to defeat it.

“A lot of the people on the shop floor are saying, ‘Hell no, we don’t like it,’” she said. Workers confronted shop committee members on the factory floor Sunday after the deal was announced. “They told us this is as good as it’s going to get.” When workers pressed union officials on what would happen if the contract were voted down again, they warned that the UAW International would intervene, and it would likely go to an arbitrator. “They told us: ‘You don’t know what you’re going to get.’ They might just say, ‘Well, you’re going to go back to your 1st time agreement.’”

This threat of arbitration, Marsha made clear, is being used as a weapon to frighten workers into accepting another rotten deal. “It’s one thing for these union officials to say this is the best we can do when they sit in their air conditioned offices every day. I can’t tell you how many surgeries I’ve been through, and I probably need another one.”

After two decades on the job, she said, “I’ll be at \$27.00 at the end of the contract.” When she was hired in, workers at the same facility were making \$29 an hour. “I hired in at \$14, half of that,” she said. Two decades later, \$3 over four years is what the union is presenting as a victory.

Workers are also angry about a sharp increase in disciplinary exposure buried in the new deal. The point threshold for disciplinary action would be lowered from 18 to 12—meaning workers exhausted from a second job, or whose car broke down, face faster termination.

Management's HR director had already delivered the message: "They are not playing games with people no more. People are going to start getting fired." The union touts a perfect attendance bonus—four extra days off per year with no unexcused absences—while burying the reality. "That's only 16 hours more," Marsha said, "and I have to work for it." The ratification bonus rises from \$2,000 to \$2,500, but the previous \$3,000 grievance settlement bonus has been removed.

Marsha described a workforce stretched to the breaking point. "There's a lot of workers who have bridge cards (Michigan's food stamp program) because they can't afford food. I haven't been to the grocery store in a while because I'm afraid of the prices."

A coworker works nights as a certified nursing assistant, caring for sick people in their homes three days a week, then comes in to Nexteer. She has five kids. "I was reading about Costco employees who can make up to \$30 an hour after they start you off at \$20," Marsha added. "The new Nexteer starting wage of \$19.50 is less than what Costco pays on day one—and Costco doesn't destroy your body."

A young worker with less than five years on the job told the WSWS: "I don't know who our bargaining committee is bargaining for. At this point it has to be a strike and they're trying everything in the book to prevent one. People need to realize they never will care. Unless you show them you mean business. I see what's going on with Dana and American Axle. We need to unite and show them that without us there is none of these companies, none of these bonuses, none of these Black Lake retreats. We need to know our worth."

Despite the pressure and the fear, Marsha was direct about the leverage workers hold. "You can tell that management is scared we might go on strike. If we went out on strike, we would shut down GM, Ford and Stellantis in less than a day. They'd be out of parts." Nexteer supplies steering components that feed directly into assembly lines across all Big Three Detroit automakers.

She was also clear about what kind of action workers want: "We don't want another one-day strike like 2015. We want to make a big impact." And on the history of capitulation: "The only reason it got a little bit better is because we told them to shove it. We've been suckers for 20 years. But now we have nothing to lose. You've got to stand strong."

**Vote "No"—and build the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee**

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on Nexteer workers to vote down this third sellout with the contempt it deserves and build the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee as the instrument for carrying the fight forward, constructing a new leadership drawn from workers rather than bureaucrats.

Workers should demand rank-and-file oversight of the ratification vote itself, with ballot counting supervised by representatives chosen by workers on the shop floor, not by Local 699 officials who have shown time and again that their loyalties lie with the company. The UAW's track record of suspicious ratification results, as in 2021, means workers cannot simply trust the count to the bureaucracy that negotiated the deal.

The current bargaining committee must be dismissed and replaced by a committee of trusted rank-and-file workers—chosen by the membership, accountable to the membership, negotiating in the open, on terms set by workers, not management. The new committee should immediately set a clear deadline: no contract, no work. No more endless extensions while the company stockpiles parts. No arbitration. A real strike, with strike pay of at least \$1,000 a week, so that workers are not forced back by financial desperation before their demands are won.

Nexteer workers should reach out immediately to their brothers and sisters at Dana, American Axle, Bridgewater Interiors, Magna Seating and the Big Three assembly plants, calling on them to honor Nexteer picket lines and refuse to handle scab parts. As Marsha put it: "We're all autoworkers, and we just want to live and feed our families, whether it's here or in Mexico or another country."

The Nexteer workers' fight is part of a broader rebellion by auto parts workers against poverty wages, brutal working conditions and UAW collaboration with management. To join or contact the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee, fill out the form at the bottom of this article.



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