

The Nexteer workers' revolt and the case for rank-and-file committees throughout the auto parts industry

Jerry White
25 May 2026

Nexteer and other auto parts workers: Fill out the form at the end of this article for information building rank-and-file committees to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to shop floor workers.

On May 20–21, 2026, 1,300 workers at Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan voted by 86 percent to authorize a strike. This vote followed the rejection of two UAW-backed concession contracts by 96 percent in early April and 73 percent in mid-May.

The Nexteer struggle is now at a critical turning point. The UAW bureaucracy ignored the overwhelming strike mandate and brought back a third sellout deal, with voting to begin on Thursday. Starting pay remains at \$19.50 an hour. Production workers with at least 24 months of seniority would top out at \$27 an hour under a deal running through 2030. For context: Delphi Saginaw Steering workers—at the same plant, before GM spun it off—earned \$27 an hour in 2005.

A signing bonus of \$2,500 is included as window dressing on what is a continuation of the concessions at this plant since the early 2000s. The point threshold for disciplinary action and termination has been reduced from 18 to 12. Computerized cycle-time surveillance, already implemented by management to enforce speed-up, is not contested in any version of the contract the bargaining committee has produced.

This demonstrates for the umpteenth time that no amount of pressure on the UAW apparatus will force it to fight for workers. The bloated salaries and affluent lifestyles of the union bureaucrats depend on their ability to police workers and impose the dictates of corporate management. The Nexteer workers can only go forward if they take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands.

The issues facing Nexteer workers are the same issues facing all workers in the industry—parts, assembly, new hires, seniority workers. Nexteer workers and their counter-parts at Dana, American Axle, Magna, Bridgewater and other parts companies whose contracts are also expiring are in a unique position. Under the just-in-time system, a strike by Nexteer workers under the control of the rank and file could open up the floodgates for workers to overturn decades of concessions by the UAW bureaucracy.

UAW CS/IPS conference to fight the membership

Just weeks before workers voted for strike action, the UAW Competitive Shop/Independent, Parts, Suppliers (CS/IPS) Department held its all-expense paid 2026 national conference at the Atlanta Marriott Marquis, presided over by President Shawn Fain and CS/IPS Director Richard Boyer.

The conference explicitly endorsed “IEB approved wage and benefit standards”: not a floor protecting workers, but a ceiling capping what workers are permitted to win. Its most revealing aspect was a special session to train local union officials to watch for “warning signs” of rank-and-file dissent—including workers “obsessing about problems and blaming others,” i.e., demanding the UAW bureaucracy do something about poverty wages, unsafe conditions and management dictatorship. The Atlanta conference was not a conference for fighting employers, but for fighting the membership.

CS/IPS Director Richard Boyer was also the chief negotiator of the sellout contract at Stellantis after the bogus “Stand Up” strike in 2023. His own published correspondence confirms that both he and Fain knew the company would not convert all 5,500 supplemental employees to full-time status—the central promise used to sell the deal.

Under the safety conditions produced by Boyer’s “labor-management partnership,” Antonio Gaston, 53, was crushed to death at the Toledo Jeep Complex on August 22, 2024. The OSHA fine was \$16,131. Ronald Adams Sr., 63, was killed at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Complex on April 7, 2025. The MIOSHA investigation remains stonewalled more than a year later.

The history of struggle in the parts industry

The UAW CS/IPS Department was founded by the 1964 UAW Convention to protect the wage and benefit standards won in the great organizing struggles of the 1930s and 1940s. By 1957, those struggles had produced near-parity: mean earnings in supplier firms had risen to 95.3 percent of assembly wages.

The advances which built the UAW during the Great Depression were themselves the product of rebellion—not only against the corporations, but against a craft union bureaucracy that had excluded the mass of industrial workers. The AFL regarded unskilled workers, many of whom were black, immigrant and women workers, with open contempt, calling them “the garbage on labor’s doorstep.”

The militant strikes, sit-downs and other mass struggles of the 1930s—Toledo Auto Lite, Spencer (Dana), Bendix, Kelsey-Hayes, Midland Steel, Champion Spark Plug, GM Flint—were led by socialist militants fighting in defiance of that bureaucracy.

This explosive movement could only go forward if it took a political form through the building of an independent political movement against the two corporate-controlled parties, and for workers’ power and the socialist reorganization of society. But the pro-capitalist leaders of the

newly formed CIO—Walter Reuther, John L. Lewis, Philip Murray, Sydney Hillman—rejected widespread calls for the building of a Labor Party and subordinated the working class to the Democratic Party and American imperialism’s drive for global domination during World War II.

This had disastrous consequences. The CIO’s efforts to organize the South after World War II during “Operation Dixie” failed primarily because its leaders refused to challenge the Democratic Party’s enforcement of Jim Crow segregation. Under Reuther’s “Treaty of Detroit” in 1950, the UAW dropped any challenge to management’s decision-making monopoly.

By the late 1970s, when Japanese and German competition eroded the dominance of American capitalism, the UAW made its strategic choice: abandon the fight for parity wages and embrace labor-management collaboration. The IPS Department, created to combat the pressure of non-union “runaway factories” and maintain close to parity wages between parts workers and assembly workers, was converted into the instrument for systematically widening the wage differential.

The Chrysler bailout of 1979–80 was the inflection point. UAW President Douglas Fraser—the IPS Council’s founder—joined Chrysler’s board and collaborated in destroying 80,000 jobs. The decades that followed were a deliberate betrayal of strikes across the Midwest—at AP Parts in Toledo (9.5 months, 1984–85), Dana, Doehler-Jarvis, Johnson Controls, Excel Industries, and American Axle (87 days, 2008)—in which the UAW cancelled solidarity actions and imposed two-tier structures as the settlement in every case.

The results of two decades of managed concessions are captured in a single statistic: in 1980, auto parts workers earned wages averaging 15 percent below Big Three assembly workers. By 2000, the differential had risen to 31 percent. Simultaneously, union density in the independent parts sector fell from 65 percent in the mid-1970s to less than 20 percent by 1995.

The lowering of transportation costs and revolutionary developments in technology facilitated the globalization of capitalist production and the shifting of auto parts manufacturing to low-wage regions. Between 1978 and 1998, GM built more than 50 parts factories in Mexico, which would come to employ more than 70,000 workers, making its parts subsidiary Delphi Automotive the country’s largest private employer.

North of the border, the UAW cleared the path for the Delphi and Visteon spin-offs by isolating and betraying strikes by Delphi workers in Dayton, Ohio in 1996 and in Flint, Michigan in 1998—the latter a 54-day walkout that paralyzed GM’s North American production.

GM announced the Delphi spin-off less than a week after the Flint strike was ended without the workers’ demands being met. Ford followed with Visteon the following year. The UAW gave its institutional approval to both. In the 2003 contract cycle, the UAW agreed for the first time in its history to a two-tier wage structure with Delphi and Visteon.

In 2005, Delphi CEO Steve Miller—a veteran of the Chrysler bailout restructurings—took Delphi into bankruptcy and demanded 60 percent wage cuts, the gutting of health benefits and the elimination of thousands of jobs. Speaking for the whole ruling class, Miller declared:

Globalization is a fact of life these days...The days when manual unskilled labor can deliver \$65 an hour are disappearing... Defined-benefit programs are an anachronism, and we are witnessing the slow agonizing death of defined benefits as industrial compensation policy...

The UAW facilitated the verdict. Through months of court proceedings, the union negotiated buyouts and buy-downs designed to push out higher-

paid veteran workers and clear the way for a cheap-labor workforce. The plant that became Nexteer—the Saginaw Steering Division, where workers were earning \$27 an hour in 2005—was spun through this process. Today, twenty years later, the same plant’s workers are offered \$27 an hour as a top rate in 2030.

From 1979 to the early 2020s, UAW membership fell from 1.5 million to less than 400,000 members. But the UAW bureaucracy made up for the loss of dues income through direct payments from the corporations to a myriad of labor-management programs. The exposure and jailing of more than a dozen top UAW bureaucrats for taking company bribes and embezzling dues, including UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell, Fain’s boss at the UAW-Chrysler Department dubbed “the center of the culture of corruption in the UAW” by federal investigator, was just the tip of the iceberg.

Reject the third contract. Replace the bargaining committee. Build the rank-and-file committee

The third tentative agreement must be voted down. It does not close the wage gap, does not restore COLA, does not eliminate the tier system, tightens disciplinary exposure, and arrives less than 48 hours after an 86 percent strike vote. The arbitration threat is the bureaucracy’s final instrument of intimidation—a bluff that should be called.

But rejection alone is not enough. Three rejections will produce a fourth contract just as rotten as the previous three, unless workers take the conduct of this fight into their own hands.

The Local 699 bargaining committee has proven through three rounds that it negotiates for the company, not the membership. It must be removed and replaced by an elected rank-and-file strike committee of the most trusted and militant workers from every department, every tier and every shift.

Negotiations must be conducted in full view of the membership—every proposal, every company demand, every counter-offer reported in real time. No closed-door deals. The UAW’s \$840 million strike fund was built from workers’ dues. Strike benefits of \$1,000 per week must be guaranteed to sustain a real fight.

The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee’s demands—abolition of all tiers, equal pay for equal work, immediate wage increases with COLA, full company-paid healthcare and pensions for all workers, workers’ control over line speed and safety conditions, enforceable prohibitions on cycle-time surveillance—are the minimum required to reverse four decades of UAW-administered concessions.

The workers who built the CIO did not win by appealing to the AFL bureaucracy that called them “garbage on labor’s doorstep.” They won by acting in defiance of it. The great sit-down strikes—at Bendix, Midland Steel, Kelsey-Hayes and Flint—were organized from the shop floor, led by socialist militants, in direct opposition to union structures that feared the rebellion as much as the corporations did. The Trotskyist James P. Cannon described these workers as “new people—the young mass production workers, the new young militants whom nobody had ever heard of”—and their revolt as “the revolt of the pariahs against their pariah status.”

Just like the 1930s, the revolt of Nexteer workers against their pariah status requires independent organization. Workers have already voted by 86 percent to strike. They do not need permission to strike from Solidarity House bureaucrats whose livelihoods are not at stake.

The democratic will of the membership can only be forced if workers take matters into their own hands. This means expanding the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee and preparing a real fight.

A strike must be launched to reverse four decades of concessions:

restored parity wages with Big Three assembly workers, reinstated cost-of-living adjustments, and company-paid pensions and medical benefits for every worker regardless of hire date. These demands require the rank and file to control the strike—setting the deadline, directing the pickets, determining what constitutes an acceptable settlement.

The fight must be conducted with an international perspective. Fain’s response to Mexican auto parts workers occupying their factories in sit-down actions earlier this year was to back Trump’s tariffs and blame Mexican workers for American job losses.

But as Nexteer worker Marsha put it plainly: “We’re all autoworkers, and we just want to live and feed our families, whether it’s here or in Mexico or another country.” American Axle workers at 98 percent and Dana workers at 95 percent are the natural allies in this fight.

A strike that sends pickets to Big Three assembly plants and reaches across the supply chain—including to workers in Mexico—transforms a single-plant dispute into a movement capable of dismantling, once and for all, the IEB-approved ceiling that the Fain/Boyer apparatus has enforced in Atlanta and in Saginaw.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact