

“You’re setting an example for everybody”: Big Three workers back Nexteer rank and file as opposition mounts to third UAW-backed sellout

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For information on joining the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee, fill out the form below.

Opposition is mounting among Nexteer Automotive workers in Saginaw, Michigan, to a third tentative agreement pushed by the United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracy, as rank-and-file workers at Ford have stepped forward to voice their solidarity and a retired General Motors (GM) veteran urges workers to take their fight into their own hands.

The situation at Nexteer—a major supplier of steering and driveline components—has become a flashpoint in the broader struggle of auto parts workers against UAW concessions. Two successive tentative agreements have already been voted down. UAW officials have extended the contracts behind workers’ backs without any consultation or vote. After the second rejection, workers forced a strike vote and then voted 86 percent to walk out. Voting begins Thursday on a third tentative agreement, which workers say is little more than a reshuffling of the same inadequate terms they have already rejected twice.

What the UAW bureaucracy fears above all is a strike at a strategic parts plant. Under conditions of just-in-time production, in which assembly plants carry minimal inventory and depend on a continuous flow of parts, a walkout at Nexteer could rapidly cascade through the supply chain and halt production at major GM, Ford and Stellantis assembly plants. The UAW’s contempt for the will of the membership is not limited to Nexteer: Defying an overwhelming strike authorization vote by some 4,000 workers at Dana Corp., it agreed to a week-long contract extension through May 29—again without consultation or vote—with workers simply informed after the fact.

At Nexteer, workers have begun circulating their own flyers opposing the deal, and the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee has issued a statement calling for rejection. Their anger is not difficult to understand. As one Nexteer worker explained, wages topping out in 2030 at exactly the 2005 level—\$27 an hour—represent, accounting for inflation, a pay cut of roughly \$1 an hour for each of the past twenty years. A pickup truck that cost \$36,000 in 2005 now runs for \$65,000. “Tomorrow’s wage does not cover today’s costs,” he said.

The contract roll-out meeting itself told the story. “On Tuesday, when we had our meeting on the contract in the plant it was supervisors pitching this agreement,” one worker said. “If workers didn’t question our UAW committeeman, he never would have spoken. He was just sitting there, and we embarrassed him, because we said, ‘Why have you done this?’ He just hemmed and hawed and said, ‘It’s not my job.’ We said ‘Whose job is it? You’re part of the committee and signed off on this garbage.’”

A worker with 13 years seniority was direct: “We’re ready to strike. The union keeps throwing us BS TAs [Tentative Agreements]. They switch some numbers around and say it’s a better deal.” He added: “Management said GM is behind 7,000 vehicles and Stellantis is behind 4,000. Let’s make it more! I think there should be one tier—that’s what we have to fight for.” Another veteran observed: “Good people are starting to see it now. There was quite a few asking why this vote is being pushed along so quickly, realizing that both management and the union have been lying straight to their faces.”

Rouge workers speak out: “When you walk the line, we will stop any scab parts”

The revolt by the Nexteer workers has inspired workers in the Big Three auto plants who are seething over mass job cuts, mandatory overtime and other unsafe conditions, which the UAW President Shawn Fain and the union apparatus has sanctioned after the sellout of the 2023 contract fight. Martaz Crutchfield, who is running for delegate to the UAW Constitutional Convention next month as a member of Will Lehman’s Insurgent Slate, said the following:

Brothers and sisters at Nexteer Saginaw, I’ve been asked by the Rank-and-File Committee at Ford Rouge Dearborn Truck Plant, UAW Local 600 to extend to you our

complete solidarity. When you walk the line, we will stop any scab parts they try to run. This scene is too familiar and a threat to every autoworker.

The “offer” the UAW pushes is an INSULT: Wages for 2030 top out exactly where they were in 2005. \$27 an hour. That means after inflation you will have taken a \$1/hr pay cut every year for 20 years running—a massive crime. But revenge is at hand.

Shawn Fain’s fake strike in 2023 set up Ford to wipe out several thousand jobs at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center. Now we hear parts plants everywhere are headed for skeleton crews. And the same is coming to DTP. Robots and AI are wiping out jobs by the thousands while investors revel in profit. The jobs in plants our fathers and grandfathers built for us are being destroyed before our eyes.

To frame the underlying dynamic, Crutchfield drew on a piece by David North entitled *A Letter From Afar*, published on the *World Socialist Web Site*, which imagines Abraham Lincoln speaking from beyond the grave—naming the system in which workers must sell their labor to those who own the land, the factory and the tools as the cause of today’s crisis, as slavery was the cause of Lincoln’s own. The full piece can be read on the WSWS.

“But the real question is: What are we going to do about it?” Crutchfield wrote. His answer is the building of genuine rank-and-file committees—“real worker-controlled committees. Elected by workers. Accountable to workers. Recallable by workers—that fight for safety, oppose layoffs and AI-driven job cuts, unite workers across plants and industries and link up with workers internationally. This is about us as a unit—building a rank-and-file movement,” he concluded.

Retired GM worker: “You got to get your guts together”

Lyle, an 85-year-old retired General Motors worker who worked at plants in Saginaw, Flint, Ypsilanti and Fleetwood in Detroit, had direct words for Nexteer workers.

“The best advice that I can give the guys at Nexteer is, you gotta get tough, stand up and fight. Your fathers and your grandfathers did a hell of a job fighting, and they’re taking everything that they gained away. It’s gonna cost you, but it’s gonna cost you more if you don’t. You can’t just lay down and let the union and the damn company run right over the top of you.”

He was unequivocal about what victory requires: “There’s only one answer, and that’s the strike. Stop their production, and everybody goes out, everybody stands together. Without that determination and without the guts, you’re not gonna get anywhere.”

Lyle traced a direct line from the UAW’s capitulations of the 1980s to the plant closures and job losses that followed. “When

the unions started capitulating, the companies were closing down and moving, using that as a threat against our wages. We could have struck and stopped their money and said, ‘Either you stay here or you don’t make money.’ But the unions didn’t stand behind us. That’s why we lost all the jobs. Now, if you’re not gonna stand up, they’re gonna take your jobs whether you stand up or not. So you better stand up hard.”

He dismissed UAW President Shawn Fain without ceremony: “All he does is talk rhetoric. He’s like a politician—tells you what you want to hear, then does what the companies want him to do.” And on whether workers need UAW leadership to act, he pointed to the founding moment of the labor movement itself: “In the 1930s, the strikes in Flint and all over the country—there was no union. All the workers got together and they walked out. There were lots of wildcat strikes. You don’t need the union leaders. Form your own rank-and-file committees and walk out. Period.”

The spark of a wider rebellion

A strike by Nexteer workers will not occur in isolation. It could ignite a full-scale rebellion by parts workers across the industry—at Dana, Bridgewater, Magna, American Axle and dozens of other suppliers—fighting for parity wages with Big Three workers and the abolition of all tiers after decades of UAW-negotiated concessions.

Lyle placed the struggle in its broadest context. “Our generation looked to the union leaders, and that’s why we lost all the jobs. So you better stand up for yourselves now and fight hard for your decent wages. Make sure if they threaten to move your plant, you’ll walk out again and stop their profits.”

He recalled that the fighters who built the labor movement in the 1930s “were socialists—thinking about workers, not the capitalists, and about how workers get in control. The UAW bureaucrats defend capitalism and are in bed with management.”

His final words: “If Nexteer workers walk out now, they will set an example for everybody. Our efforts, our strikes should be worldwide. We’re the majority. We’re the masses. We have the power and the numbers. We can stop production, stop profits. And that way, you can stop wars too. Without guts and a new leadership, you’re not going to get anywhere. That’s the way it’s got to be.”

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