

Nexteer workers denounce third UAW sellout contract: “Enough is enough”

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Rank-and-file workers at the Nexteer Automotive plant in Saginaw, Michigan are opposed to a third pro-company contract pushed by the United Auto Workers International and Local 699 bureaucracy. Voting, which took place all day Thursday, is ending Friday morning with results expected shortly afterwards.

Outside the union hall, opponents of the deal distributed a flyer calling for a no vote. They pointed out that the \$27 an hour wage workers will get in 2030, is the same workers at the former General Motors Saginaw Steering Plant made in 2005—even though the cost of living has risen by more than 70 percent over the last two decades.

Adjusted for inflation, the 2005 wage is worth over \$45 today.

A statement from the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee was also circulated calling for a rejection of the deal. Following its defeat, the committee urges workers to demand an emergency membership meeting to set an immediate strike date, throw out the discredited bargaining committee, and elect a rank-and-file committee to outline workers non-negotiable demands, and a strategy to mobilize all auto and auto parts workers to behind a walkout. This includes demanding a \$1,000 a week in strike benefits.

The 1,300 workers at the plant have already rejected two UAW-backed tentative agreements by overwhelming margins—the first by 96.2 percent on April 2, the second by 73 percent on May 15—and voted by 86 percent to authorize a strike. But rather than honor that mandate, UAW International and Local 699 officials have done everything in their power to prevent a walkout. They have extended the contract behind workers’ backs without a vote, lied to workers that a strike would be “illegal,” and now is bringing back a third agreement almost identical to the last one in all fundamentals.

Workers going to vote at the union hall Wednesday told the WSWS in no uncertain terms what they thought of the

deal.

“Hopefully, this goes down to defeat,” said a veteran worker who had spent the day handing out flyers to defeat the sellout. “They tried to get the lower seniority workers to vote for this with the small pay bump. But I told them, if you ever dreamed about owning a house, it’s not going to be the kind that you grew up with ... because our wages are falling so far behind the cost of living. Whether this passes or fails, we have to get rid of the people who brought this garbage back to us.”

After the second tentative agreement failed, the UAW and the company front loaded a \$2.50 an hour pay bump for workers currently earning \$21.50 an hour. The strategy is to cynically use economic insecurity caused by twenty years of concessions to pressure workers into voting yes. The union has simultaneously made clear to Nexteer management that it will do nothing to prevent the layoffs of those very workers after ratification.

A pay raise without job security, as the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee noted in its statement, “is a promise written on water.”

The contract also raises out-of-pocket healthcare costs for workers hired after 2021, with premiums rising 3 percent each year. And it lowers the attendance points threshold for automatic discharge from 18 to 12, meaning workers can be terminated more swiftly.

A worker with 20 years at the plant was direct: “We can do better than this. We have to make up for everything that we’ve lost over the last two decades. I’m tired of all these concessions.”

Another worker with 10 years at the plant cut through the bureaucracy’s presentation of the deal: “All they did was move the same money around and front loaded some of the raises. We didn’t get anything. I’m not falling for this. The Big Three guys have gone through this too. Fain’s ‘Stand Up strike’ [a partial strike at the Big 3 automakers in 2023 that was followed by mass layoffs] was stage managed. The UAW International is controlled by Ford, GM and Stellantis.”

“I’m voting no,” a worker with 20 years said. “We’ve been losing ever since we got hired here. It’s time for us to get something back.”

Informed that Dana workers, American Axle workers, Magna and Bridgewater Interiors workers all face contract expirations at the same moment, he responded, “Well, we all have to stand together then.”

Another worker reflected on what two decades at Nexteer have cost him. “I’ve been there 20 years, and it’s like they don’t want to give us anything. We’re still working for the Big Three, if you ask me. But they just don’t want to give us anything. A strike would be good because then that way they would know that the people are not going to take this anymore. We’re the ones that they’re standing on. I’ve hurt my back all these years and my knee, you know what I’m saying? So, I’m on the downside of it. It’s too long, 20 years of that. I came in at \$14.50 an hour. We got to stand for something.”

Another veteran worker said, “It’s important for the Big Three workers to support us because we’re doing this line work and we’re out there on the floor like they are. We are all making cars, but we’re only getting so much money. I’m hoping that we get better. We build [cars] but we can’t afford them because they’re pretty expensive. The trucks are like \$60,000 to \$80,000, depending what you get. They need to be paying more money, so maybe you can afford a newer car and to fill up your gas tank.”

A worker spoke with the accumulated anger of 20 years of abuse and betrayals by the UAW bureaucracy. “It’s time now that we need to stand and use our power. All of us put a car together, but we are the wheels. And if a car doesn’t have wheels, then it can’t move. So at the end of the day, we’re tired of the lies. We’re tired of you all getting bonuses but we’re getting nothing. People have to work all these hours to bring home decent wages. After 20 years, it hurts.”

She went directly to the question of tiers, the mechanism through which the UAW bureaucracy has systematically divided the workforce. “When you keep taking from the low man to give to the higher people that’s making \$300,000 and more, the executives—take it from the high up with the money, not the low man. We came in here in 2006 at half of the wages—\$14 dollars—of the ones that worked here before. The people that trained us, they were getting \$28 an hour. We were doing the same job.”

“No more tiers,” she said. “Like baby shampoo. No more tiers. This job used to be able to support a family. When I came here, I had a pension. The pension was taken. We had COLA. That’s gone. You name it, seniority don’t mean anything these days.”

She was incensed over Local 699 bargaining chairman

Carl McKee bringing back one pro-company deal after another. “Carl, our bargaining chairman, is doing the same thing. In a meeting, he says, ‘Well this is a good contract, and I just want you all to know I’m voting yes to this.’ That’s what he said in our meeting. You saying yes to this, so what’s your kickback?”

Her message to workers across the tier and seniority divide was equally sharp. “I’d say to the young workers they need to stand with those who have been here because we all need to stand and fight. You just can’t look at, ‘Well I’m skilled trades, I’m new hire, I’m temp, I’m legacy.’ Why is it split? They have been playing each other against each other. They only flood the temps in to get the yes votes—and then they get rid of them. They have done that since we’ve been here.”

On the threat of plant closures and offshoring that management and union officials have both used to browbeat workers into accepting concessions: “We can’t be afraid to strike. We can’t fall for the lie they’re telling us that they’re going to send the jobs off. They told us that 15 years ago. They want to use scare tactics. But I know if I fight now, if I’m going to hurt, then the company is going to hurt. If I’m out of a job, the company is going to be out of a job. Enough is enough.”

Her final words addressed the broader convergence of contract fights now unfolding across the auto parts industry, where approximately 4,000 Dana workers in four states face an expired contract tonight, 1,300 American Axle workers in Three Rivers, Michigan face expiration this Sunday, and Magna International and Bridgewater Interiors workers are also at critical junctures.

“It’s time to unify,” she said, “because that’s what they do, they wait to see what this one is going to do, what that one is going to do. But far as our bargaining, the UAW doesn’t back you. After today, if we’re waiting on them to call a strike, it isn’t going to happen. We have to do just like our great-grandfathers did. I don’t have any more years to be working for free. I had enough. And I’m going to fight. I need mine. If I’m going to work for you, then you are going to pay me for what I’m worth.”



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