

# The Nexteer rebellion: The working class vs the trade union apparatus

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees  
29 May 2026

A rebellion is underway at Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan. On Friday morning, for the third time in less than two months, 1,300 workers at the auto parts plant voted down a pro-company tentative agreement brought forward by United Auto Workers Local 699. The overall vote was 55–45 percent against, with production workers rejecting it by 59 percent. The result follows the April 2 rejection of the first tentative agreement by 96.2 percent, the May 14 rejection of the second by 73 percent, and the May 20–21 strike authorization vote, which passed by 86 percent.

True to form, the UAW apparatus has responded by presenting workers with the same contract with cosmetic tweaks designed to blur the core issue and wear down resistance. The aim is to convince workers that there is no alternative but to accept poverty-level wages in an environment of rising living costs—while productivity demands and tiered structures ensure that the next round of concessions is already baked in.

The defiance of the Nexteer workers has reached the point of open confrontation with the apparatus. At a UAW Local 699 membership meeting on Sunday May 18, International servicing representative Jason Tuck — who collects \$148,476 a year and was Local 699 bargaining chairman for the 2021 concessions contract before being promoted to the international apparatus — cursed workers, threatened them with the closure of the plant if they went on strike, and walked out mid-meeting when the membership made clear they would not be intimidated.

The Local 699 newsletter issued Friday morning is a document dripping with contempt for workers. After claiming that “we recognize the significance of this vote,” it proceeds to declare that the current agreement remains in effect; no strike has been called; work schedules remain unchanged; ‘all members are expected

to continue working as scheduled’; ‘any decision regarding a strike or work stoppage can only come through official union authorization’; members should ‘avoid speculation’ and await ‘accurate guidance.’

The apparatus speaks to workers as if they were children. Translated into plain language, their message is: “Your vote does not matter. Your opinions have no influence on our operations with the company, which we represent. Shut up, and do what we tell you.”

There is no reason to think anything substantively better will emerge from continued “negotiations.” Why should the company offer more? Nexteer management knows the UAW apparatus will not call a strike, and therefore it has no reason to offer anything different.

In fact, the terms the corporation is attempting to push through were worked out between the company and the apparatus long ago. What is taking place behind closed doors is not negotiation in any meaningful sense, but a conspiracy to determine how the same management-written contract can be pushed through a fourth, fifth, or sixth vote. If that fails, the apparatus has already signaled that it will move to impose terms through arbitration.

The UAW is not a union in any conventional sense. It is not an organization through which workers fight collectively against their employers. It is controlled by an apparatus packed with officials whose salaries range from \$150,000 to over \$270,000 a year and who function as labor police, as an arm of corporate human resources.

The top 15 UAW officials alone collected \$3.2 million in 2024. Fain took home \$274,407, while a 93-page report from the court-appointed UAW Monitor documented threats to ‘slit the f---ing throats’ of anyone who challenged his inner circle.

Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker who ran for

UAW president in 2022 and is running again in 2026, noted in 2022 that if Fain were elected the only thing that would change was his own salary. This judgment has been validated in every respect, though if anything the betrayals of the apparatus have become even more flagrant and shameless.

The more the apparatus betrays, the more aggressively the pseudo-left organizations around the Democratic Party promote it. The Democratic Socialists of America has been intimately involved in the political operation through which Fain was promoted as a great reformer. Top aides drawn from the DSA pocket six-figure salaries at Solidarity House alongside Fain, who has established a de facto alliance with Trump on the basis of economic nationalism.

Notably, *Jacobin* magazine, affiliated with the DSA, which has aggressively promoted Fain, has written precisely nothing about the struggle at Nexteer. They do not support the apparatus despite its betrayals, but because of them. As with the apparatus itself, they speak for privileged sections of the upper middle class that are completely hostile to the workers.

The apparatus cannot be reformed. The bureaucracy is not the workers' representative; it is the workers' enemy. Any genuine struggle, including strike action, will not be carried out by the apparatus. It must be prepared and led by the workers themselves.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) urges workers to form new organizations, democratically controlled by workers on the shop floor, independent of the apparatus, the corporations, and the political parties that serve both. The task is the transfer of power from the bureaucracy to the rank-and-file and abolish the apparatus as an institutional barrier between the workers and their collective struggle.

This pattern is not unique to the UAW. The entire trade union apparatus, across every industry, functions in the same fundamental way. In January and February of this year, the New York State Nurses Association shut down a historic 41-day strike and sent 15,000 nurses back to work under concessions agreements that workers did not even have a chance to read.

In March and April, the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7 shut down the largest US meatpacking strike in more than 60 years — the three-week walkout by 3,800 workers at the JBS beef plant in Greeley,

Colorado. The UFCW ordered workers back to work on April 7 without a contract after permitting scab “replacement workers” to continue plant operations during the strike.

There are countless other examples. In every case, the bureaucracy works hand in glove with management to prevent workers' independent action from threatening either the corporations' profits or the apparatus' own institutional position.

What is taking place at Nexteer is one expression of a rebellion underway throughout the international working class. In Italy, workers have staged three general strikes this month alone against austerity, war, and the Gaza genocide—while the CGIL, CISL, and UIL bureaucracies deliberately abstained. In Germany, opposition to IG Metall is growing across major companies as the union has refused to organize a single industrial action despite 160,000 job losses. In Bolivia, an indefinite national strike has brought the country to a standstill, while the COB union apparatus works feverishly to contain opposition.

The Nexteer workers have lit a flame that workers throughout the auto industry and beyond are watching.

The IWA-RFC urges Nexteer workers to take the next step: build and expand the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee as the operational leadership of the struggle, independent of the discredited Local 699 bargaining committee. Demand a mass membership meeting controlled by the workers themselves. Connect with the Dana workers whose contract expired Friday night, with the American Axle workers facing expiration Sunday, with the Bridgewater Interiors and Magna Seating workers at critical junctures, with the Big Three workers — at Ford Rouge and elsewhere — who have already pledged to refuse scab parts.

The way forward is the one the working class is being driven to forge in country after country: independent organization, new institutions of struggle, and a conscious break with the bureaucracies that have served as the principal obstacle to the international workers' movement.



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