

The American Axle strike and the revolt of the auto parts workers

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On Monday morning, 1,000 workers at American Axle's Three Rivers, Michigan, plant went on strike for the first time since 2008. The walkout by members of UAW Local 2093 is part of a growing revolt among auto parts workers, who are fighting to overturn decades of UAW-backed concessions that have imposed poverty wages and intensified exploitation.

Workers at AAM, rebranded "Dauch Corporation" by CEO Richard Dauch, top out at about \$22 an hour after five years. In 2008, long-time workers made as much as \$29 an hour—about double today's pay in real terms—before the UAW shut down an 87-day strike and pushed through wage cuts to \$14.50. Management then slashed half the workforce and closed the Detroit and Buffalo-area plants by 2012, leaving Three Rivers as the last major unionized facility.

Meanwhile, CEO Richard Dauch has taken home \$111 million in compensation over this period, while the company's top five executives collected nearly \$231 million combined. Over the last decade, the company has extracted \$8.4 billion in profits from workers producing roughly 800 axles a day for high-profit vehicles like GM's Silverado and Sierra. The UAW itself acknowledges that some workers are forced to sleep in their cars, live in motels or bike to work because they cannot afford the vehicles they build parts for.

The workers, who have no pensions or paid sick time, are fighting to end their pariah status and win wage parity with Big Three workers, who can earn up to \$39 an hour. They are also determined to defend their jobs as the company moves to replace workers with robots, mirroring the broader drive across corporate America to use new technologies, including AI, to slash payrolls and intensify exploitation.

While workers are determined to fight, the UAW

apparatus under President Shawn Fain is conducting a conscious operation to ensure their defeat. Workers report that in the months leading up to the walkout, announced by Fain on Sunday night, the company prepared by stockpiling parts, with the connivance of the union apparatus. The walkout was called because the bureaucracy feared an open rebellion after workers voted by an overwhelming 98 percent to authorize strike action.

The treachery of the UAW apparatus is exposed most sharply by what is happening less than 200 miles away, in Saginaw. At Nexteer Automotive, workers have voted down three pro-company tentative agreements and backed strike action by 86 percent. In response, the UAW has ignored the will of the membership and extended the contract again without a vote, while insisting that workers keep laboring under terms they have repeatedly rejected.

Many Nexteer workers are now asking the obvious question: After voting overwhelmingly to authorize a strike, why are they still being kept on the job, while American Axle workers have been sent out?

The answer is that the UAW apparatus is acting deliberately to isolate struggles and impose defeats. Nexteer is a choke point for the Big Three. A strike there, especially if linked with American Axle and other parts plants, would rapidly shut down assembly operations. That is precisely what terrifies both the corporations and the union bureaucracy.

Thousands of auto parts workers also want to walk out at Dana, Magna International, Bridgewater Interiors, Allison Off-Highway and other parts companies. After ignoring a massive strike vote by Dana workers, the UAW imposed a one-week contract extension and then announced a sellout agreement.

With the UAW Constitutional Convention beginning

June 15, the bureaucracy is also operating with outright cynicism: It can posture as “fighting” by calling a limited strike at one plant and then use a quick settlement—however rotten—to claim a “victory.”

The UAW apparatus has a big problem, however, and it is the rank and file itself, expressed in the revolt at Nexteer. Workers are showing they want a fight. The issue is that this opposition cannot remain spontaneous or trapped within the framework controlled by the bureaucracy. A unified struggle can develop only through an all-out revolt against the UAW bureaucracy and the formation of new centers of shop-floor organization and resistance—rank-and-file committees controlled by workers themselves.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is urging and assisting workers at Nexteer, American Axle, Dana and other parts manufacturers to build these committees, establish direct lines of communication and coordinated action and win active support from wider sections of workers in the US and internationally.

Workers have to recognize the UAW bureaucracy does not “represent” the membership. It is the workers’ enemy, functioning as an enforcement arm of corporate management, a labor police force.

This flows directly from the bureaucracy’s social position. The bloated salaries, perks, junkets and seats on labor-management boards depend on proving to management that they can keep workers in line. The top 15 UAW officials alone collected \$3.2 million in 2024. Fain himself took home \$274,407.

After Nexteer workers rejected the first contract, UAW International servicing representative Jason Tuck—paid \$148,476 a year—responded with threats and abuse: cursing workers, warning the plant could be closed if they struck and storming out of a membership meeting when workers refused to be intimidated. In the same period, IPS Director Richard Boyer, Fain’s chief negotiator of the fraudulent 2023 “Stand Up” sellout, convened a special conference session to train local officials to identify “warning signs” of rank-and-file dissent—i.e., to detect and suppress opposition before it can organize.

The issues posed by the Nexteer and American Axle struggles are universal. Workers internationally confront entrenched trade union apparatuses integrated into corporate management and the state. But workers

also possess immense social power, rooted in production itself, which can and must be mobilized through rank-and-file bodies that transfer initiative and control back to the shop floor.

Nexteer and American Axle workers are part of an international workforce facing global corporations. American Axle’s parent company employs tens of thousands of workers across scores of facilities in at least 16 countries. Auto parts workers in South Africa at Dana Spicer Axle have walked out against job cuts and the collusion of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), defying court injunctions.

In the past, Dauch has pointed openly to American Axle’s operations in Mexico as a means of routing supply around US plants, underscoring that victory requires breaking the nationalist framework enforced by the unions and uniting workers internationally—especially with workers in Mexico, including at GM’s Silao complex, where workers have already shown their willingness to defy retaliation and reject speedup and forced overtime.

The IWA-RFC encourages workers to move now to form a rank-and-file strike committee at American Axle and expand the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee. Elected on the shop floor and answerable to workers alone, these committees are the means to formulate the demands of the workers, establish direct communication between plants and build the organized support that is the necessary foundation for collective action.

The struggle cannot be confined to one plant. Rank-and-file committees must unify these battles and link up with workers at the Big Three and with workers throughout the US and internationally. The IWA-RFC fights to provide the framework for this unity—across industries and borders—against the dictatorship of profit.



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