

UAW bureaucracy rushes fourth sellout at Nexteer as American Axle workers walk out: “We should all be on strike at the same time”

Jerry White
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Hours after approximately 1,000 American Axle workers at the Three Rivers, Michigan plant walked out on strike Monday morning, UAW Local 699 officials reached a fourth tentative agreement with Nexteer Automotive management in Saginaw.

According to workers who have spoken to the *World Socialist Web Site*, the Local 699 bargaining committee plans to force a ratification vote inside the plant under the direct supervision of corporate management. This is a naked attempt to intimidate the 1,700 Nexteer workers into accepting a deal they have now rejected three times.

The timing is not a coincidence. Nexteer, less than 200 miles north of Three Rivers, is a critical supplier of steering components to GM, Ford and Stellantis. American Axle provides axles for the same companies’ most profitable trucks. A joint strike by the two workforces would have the power to shut down Big Three assembly lines within days. That is precisely what the UAW apparatus under President Shawn Fain is desperate to prevent.

The rush to a fourth agreement is also inseparable from the UAW’s 39th Constitutional Convention, set to open June 15 in Detroit. The Fain apparatus, in launching the strike at American Axle, is performing a “Hollywood fight”—as one worker put it—to project an image of militancy ahead of the convention. The bureaucracy hopes to carry out a controlled strike at American Axle, quickly settle it on the company’s terms, and declare a “victory” for parts workers who have long suffered from UAW collusion in corporate wage-cutting and the elimination of pensions.

The revolt of the Nexteer workers and the formation of their own independent rank-and-file committee separate and opposed to the UAW bureaucracy and the Local 699 bargaining committee has thrown a wrench into that plan.

Workers in the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee were unsparing in their assessment. “This is a bum’s rush to prevent us from being on strike with the American Axle workers,” one member said. “The International and the local don’t ever want to give us permission to strike. Because if we do, we could shut the whole auto industry down.”

He continued:

We are going to feel like we got kicked in the head by a mule if we pass something and then find out two weeks later that American Axle is making three or four dollars more an hour than we are. It would be a lot better if all of us were out on strike together. It would put more strain not only on our companies, but the Big 3, because they’re going to come to a standstill.

The cruel irony is unmistakable: the UAW International is willing to

send American Axle workers out on strike while keeping 1,700 Nexteer workers—who voted 86 percent to authorize a strike—chained to the job. The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee addressed this directly in a statement released Tuesday:

One aim of forcing through a 4th TA is to prevent a joint struggle between Nexteer workers and American Axle workers. Why aren’t we on strike with them? Because the UAW International does not want a common front of workers.

The apparatus is running a coordinated containment operation across the entire auto parts sector. The UAW also announced a tentative agreement covering approximately 4,000 Dana workers after ignoring their strike vote and unilaterally extending their contract to prevent them from walking out. Extensions, snap votes and managed “strikes” are the tools of a bureaucracy working to suppress a rebellion with the potential to shut down the entire industry.

The decision to hold the vote inside the plant is the most brazen expression of the Local 699 bargaining committee’s contempt for workers’ democratic rights. Members of the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee told the WSWs that Local 699 Chairman Carl McKee specifically contacted the election committee chairman to find out how many workers had not voted on previous tentative agreements and which plants they were in—with the explicit goal of corraling them into a “yes” vote under the watch of supervisors and managers.

One RFC member said:

They’re trying to have this next vote inside the plant with Big Brother watching over us,” one RFC member said. “Having Trump’s ICE thugs at the polling booths when you go to vote—that’s a good analogy. It’s not just totally unethical, it smells of collusion.

Workers also drew attention to a June 1 letter issued by the Local 699 Bargaining Committee warning members against “rumors, speculation, and misinformation” on “social media, unofficial channels, or secondhand conversations”—targeting the *World Socialist Web Site* and the statements of the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee. The letter claimed that the only source of “accurate information” was the bargaining committee and local union officials.

“That’s BS,” one worker said, “the bargaining committee are a bunch

of liars.” Another worker added:

Nobody trusts them or has confidence in them—that’s the whole problem. Our last TA was presented by management, and we had one bargaining committee member there who kept his mouth shut. We specifically asked him why they had not sent out our request to strike to the International? He said, “Well, that’s not my job,” and then we lit into him.

One worker noted that the Local 699 chairman had accepted a transfer into the apprenticeship electrician program, a position that will pay \$42 an hour if the fourth TA passes—more than one-and-a-half times the top rate the committee is offering production workers. Other bargaining committee members have similarly secured transfers to higher-paying positions, giving them a personal financial stake in ratification. “They all put in paper transfers to the good-paying jobs,” one worker told the WSW. “They’re not fighting for us. They’re fighting for themselves.”

There is a critical fact the Local 699 bargaining committee is working to conceal: as many as 400 workers out of the 1,700-strong Nexteer workforce face job elimination in the months following ratification—nearly a quarter of the plant’s workers.

Members of the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee have detailed the specific plant closures underway. Plant 6, which previously handled hydraulic pumps for heavy-duty GM and Chevy trucks, has lost that contract to Bosch. “Plant 6 has probably, at most, 100 bodies,” one RFC member told the WSW. “Those are all high-seniority people, so they will move over to Plants 3 and 4 and displace the lower-seniority people.” Plant 7 survives only through supplemental GM orders that can be withdrawn at any time.

The cruelty is sharpest for younger, lower-seniority workers the bargaining committee is trying to lure with the promise of \$24 an hour upon ratification. These are the very workers most at risk of being bumped out before they ever collect the higher wage.

The threat is not isolated. A wave of restructuring is sweeping the entire auto parts sector, driven by falling vehicle sales, the shift away from combustion engine components, private equity debt loads, and relentless pricing pressure from automakers. American Axle is already moving to replace workers with robots. The UAW is not fighting this—it is managing the process on management’s behalf.

Against the bargaining committee’s strategy of isolation, the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee is advancing an opposed perspective: the unity of Nexteer, American Axle and Dana workers in a joint struggle that transfers authority from the union bureaucracy to the shop floor.

One veteran worker and RFC member welcomed the American Axle strike and was direct about what Nexteer workers owe their counterparts in Three Rivers. She said:

Nexteer workers have already written to them on the American Axle page, telling them they have a lot of support from Local 699 workers. We have to warn them that Fain isn’t on our side. He’s just doing this for a political move to help him get reelected. He wants all those American Axle people at the convention to vote for him. It’s going to be, “We fought for American Axle, and look what they got.” That will be the end of it and they won’t get anything.

She was unequivocal about what must happen:

We need to be out on strike with them. We’ve already got guys here who want to go to American Axle and walk with those strikers. We all should be out together—Nexteer, American Axle, Dana, everybody.

The revolt of the Nexteer workers is already inspiring solidarity far beyond the auto industry. A Chicago teacher wrote to the Rank-and-File Committee:

Organize and fight! We the working class have the power, and we cannot keep handing it over to union bureaucrats and Democrat politicians who engage in political theater and throw us scraps. Your fight is our fight.

The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee has laid out what must happen now. The Local 699 bargaining committee—which has failed workers three times and whose members have a direct financial interest in ratification—must be recalled. A new, worker-controlled committee must negotiate in the open. Workers must reject arbitration, reject further extensions and insist on a single principle: no contract, no work!

The RFC’s demands—inflation-busting raises, parity pay with Big Three workers, abolition of all tiers, restoration of defined-benefit pensions, workers’ control over line speed and staffing, and a zero-layoff policy—are not extreme. They are what decades of stolen wages and UAW-administered concessions have made necessary.

Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and UAW presidential candidate, has called for a common fight of all parts workers and issued a warning to the American Axle workers:

The UAW bureaucracy will attempt to do to you what it has done to every struggle for the past four decades—isolate it, wear it down, and impose a terms-of-surrender agreement dressed up as a victory.

Workers should reject the fourth TA with the same contempt they brought to the first, second and third. They should insist on their right to strike alongside the American Axle workers who are already out. And they should build the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee as the instrument through which workers become the authority.

Workers can contact the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee by emailing nexteerworkersrfc@gmail.com, texting (947) 622-2198 or visiting <https://tinyurl.com/nexteerrfc>.



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