

“That’s how the union started: They all sat down.”

## Nexteer workers call for walkout to join with American Axle strikers

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*The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is hosting an online meeting Sunday, June 7 at 4pm (EDT): “Break the isolation of the American Axle strike! Unite with Nexteer and all autoworkers!” To attend the meeting, register at this link.*

The UAW bureaucracy is seeking to impose a fourth sellout tentative agreement on autoworkers at the Saginaw steering plant after the workers rejected the first three and voted by 86 percent to authorize a strike. The latest TA is in all essentials the same as the three that were voted down by the rank-and-file. It merely adds \$500 to the signing bonus, bringing it up to \$3,000, while maintaining poverty-level wages that are 40 percent less in real terms than what workers at the plant earned a quarter century ago.

Under the new TA, production workers still top out at \$27 an hour in 2030. Starting pay for new-hires remains at \$19.50 an hour. There are no limitations on the company’s use of computerized speedup mechanisms and no protections against the anticipated layoff of hundreds of younger workers.

The UAW Local 699 and UAW International bureaucracy have extended the previous contract without consulting the workers and have declared strike action “illegal.” Meanwhile, 1,000 workers at the Three Rivers American Axle plant some 200 miles to the south of Saginaw are out on strike following the expiration of their contract. Workers at Bridgewater Interiors in Warren, Michigan have rejected their own UAW-backed sellout, and Dana workers across the Midwest are preparing to vote on an agreement.

The UAW apparatus is intent on quashing the rebellion at Nexteer and blocking a strike there in order to prevent the spread of walkouts among parts workers that would quickly cripple production at the Big Three assembly plants. UAW President Shawn Fain called the strike at American Axle in an attempt to contain the seething anger of workers across the auto parts sector and strike a militant pose in advance of the UAW convention, which opens on June 15. At the same time, the UAW leadership is doing everything it can to isolate the American Axle strike and pave the way for a pro-company contract. Production workers at the Three Rivers plant make a

miserable \$22 an hour.

The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee is urging Local 699 workers to vote down the latest TA, remove the bargaining committee, and prepare strike action to unite with the American Axle workers and broaden the struggle to Dana, Bridgewater and the entire parts sector. It is calling on workers to adopt a set of non-negotiable demands, including a wage increase that makes up for the massive wage cut imposed in 2009, a cost-of-living escalator clause, and full protection against speedup and layoffs.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Nexteer workers who expressed disgust at the back-stabbing of the union leadership. A senior worker nearing retirement said:

A wildcat strike is what I want. We should just sit down right inside. That’s how the union started — they all sat down! We should all just sit down in there. Bring some couches and chairs in.

The sit-down strike was the weapon that built industrial unionism in the United States. In 1936–37, workers at General Motors in Flint, Michigan occupied their plants and refused to leave, forcing recognition of the UAW in a historic victory.

The worker noted how the company, with the union’s complicity, seeks to use a small cash payment to exploit the desperate financial situation confronting most workers. He said:

What they’re offering is a joke again. But a lot of people see that \$3,000 signing bonus and that’s enough for them. They don’t see what they’re losing to get that \$3,000 bonus. The company won’t tell them, and I keep asking them. I asked during their first roll-out: “What are you taking from us to give us this piddly offer?” They wouldn’t say a word. Everything they promise to give us they eventually take away.

He addressed one of the oldest intimidation tactics in management's toolkit:

Back when I first came here, they'd say, "Oh, we're going to move the plant to China if you don't pass the contract." I told them, "Let 'em move it to China." It would take them at least two years to do that, which is two more years of money in my pocket. If you move this to China, aren't you afraid of losing your own jobs? If it goes to China, you won't have a job either."

Nexteer operates plants not only in Saginaw, but in Poland, China, Mexico, India, and other countries. The threat to "move to China" is credible only if workers in different countries remain divided and competing against one another. The answer is not to accept a race to the bottom, but to reach out to Nexteer workers in Tychy, Poland; in Suzhou and Beijing, China; in Querétaro, Mexico, and link their struggles to the fight in Saginaw. Workers everywhere face the same companies, the same drive to suppress wages, and the same logic of international capital.

The worker noted the driving out of experienced workers:

They don't want us in there because we actually know what the contract says. We've seen how many times we're getting screwed over... This year alone, I know of at least six senior workers who are gone. They've been pounded down so hard that they're giving up.

He denounced the union bureaucrats' attempt to push through a "yes" vote by threatening binding arbitration if the new TA is rejected. He said:

The company has a lot of them scared. Even our union is going around telling people, "If you don't do this, here is what will happen, and we'll end up with a worse deal." They say, "If we don't pass this contract, it goes to arbitration, and the arbitrator will just give us the very first offer."

Another worker spoke on the arbitration threat:

I guess our bargaining chairman and several committee people have been telling people if this TA gets turned down we're going to arbitration. I say bring

it. Then we can hopefully expose this sorry ass local.

A third Nexteer worker spoke from the perspective of those younger workers who will bear the full weight of another concessions contract:

I say it's time for us to stand up and go on strike. The union keeps sending us contracts that aren't even the bare minimum for us to live for the next 4-5 years. The officials are getting paid lots of money, but we're the ones working overtime, holidays for pennies. As far as they're concerned, we're unnoticed.

It's hard to decide what we should pay out of our paycheck. Rent? Gas? Food? If I work only 40 hours a week, my take home pay is \$500. I have to work between 72 and 74 hours a week. My monthly rent is \$950, plus food, car insurance, WiFi and so on.

The other thing we don't like is the separation, the divisions which are pushed by the union and the company — between the younger and the older, production and skilled trades, and on and on. That's how they try to push these contracts among different sections of workers. We should all be the same tier. Same work for equal pay.

We still don't have any information about where or when the vote will take place. Today union officials said they haven't seen anything so good as the fourth contract offer.

The American Axle workers should stand their ground and not give in. We should join them and so should the workers at GM Flint.

*Contact the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee at [nexteerworkersrfc@gmail.com](mailto:nexteerworkersrfc@gmail.com) or text (947) 622-2198.*



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