

# “Workers at Flint Assembly and Nexteer should stop production”: Anger mounts against UAW collusion with American Axle strikebreaking

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*Are you an American Axle, Nexteer or Big Three autoworker? Fill out the form at the end of this article to get information on building rank-and-file committees.*

United Auto Workers officials at the General Motors Flint Assembly plant are allowing GM to truck in axles from the strikebound American Axle plant (Dauch Corp.) in Three Rivers, Michigan, according to information contained in a *Detroit Free Press* article Monday.

This has provoked anger from rank-and-file workers at the GM plant, who want to actively support their brothers and sisters on the picket lines just 130 miles from Flint. One thousand UAW members—who top out at \$22 an hour after a five-year progression—struck May 31 to recoup decades of UAW-backed concessions.

“General Motors’ Flint Assembly Plant receives about seven truckloads of axles every day to produce the automaker’s most profitable vehicles, pickups,” the *Free Press* notes, adding, “If the axles stop coming from Three Rivers, GM would be forced to shut down the line at Flint.”

Right now, however, deliveries are continuing, and the assembly plant is running at full tilt, with one Flint GM worker telling the *World Socialist Web Site*: “We have been running nonstop six days a week building 380-plus trucks a shift to build up inventory.”

Citing UAW Local 598 Shop Chairman Eric Welter, the *Free Press* wrote: “The *Wall Street Journal* reported that GM has about two weeks’ worth of axles stockpiled, which Welter said makes sense because the semis continue to arrive full and on time.” It quotes Welter as saying, “We bring in trucks all day long, every couple hours to supply the line.”

This does not cause the slightest consternation for Welter, UAW President Shawn Fain or the rest of the Solidarity House apparatus, whose central concern is not the fate of American Axle workers but the potential impact of their strike on GM’s bottom line. “It’s a big monster of money,” Welter told the newspaper. “There’s a lot on the line for GM with this strike.”

In comments to the *Free Press*, Welter feigns sympathy for the Three Rivers workers. The newspaper writes:

“These workers have been underpaid a very long time”

Welter said. “This is their opportunity and they’re taking advantage of it. It’s pretty rough to think they work at those wages with the way the economy is. It’s unfortunate it had to go this way.”

This is sheer hypocrisy. The UAW bureaucracy is enforcing GM’s dictates and forcing Flint workers to build GM Silverado and Sierra pickup trucks with axles from American Axle. The trucks also use steering components manufactured at the Nexteer Automotive plant 36 miles away in Saginaw, Michigan, where rank-and-file workers have rejected three UAW-backed sellout contracts and are demanding to strike alongside American Axle workers.

The Nexteer workers voted by 86 percent to authorize a strike, but the Local 699 and the UAW International bureaucracy have extended the previous contract behind the backs of the workers and are now pushing a fourth sellout tentative agreement.

On the GM Flint shop floor there is widespread sentiment for solidarity action to support the workers in Three Rivers and Saginaw. One worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “Workers at Flint Assembly and Nexteer should stop production and join the strike of American Axle workers. United we are in a more powerful position.”

On the Local 598 Active Members Facebook page, another worker posted:

I was down there yesterday and they do have management and scabs working. They made 100 axles in 1 day. The night before the strike they had about 20 trucks pulling everything in stock out. They have security all over the picket line (6 gates) about 6 to each gate standing there watching and recording them. Several workers living in vans in the parking lots ‘cause they can’t afford a house, with a cheap apartment \$2,000 a month. Everyone was grateful for our time and donations.

Welter dismissed workers’ anger over handling parts from the strikebound plant and cynically told workers to enjoy the overtime pay rates for as long as they could!

The following exchanges appeared on the Local 598 members’

communication app over the past few days:

Q: Is the UAW going to make sure we are only using union-made axles if they [American Axle] really have a non-union skeleton crew running?

A: The IUAW is monitoring inventory.

Q: I see a lot of GM plants canceled Saturdays—why are we still working if we have a limited supply of axles?

A: The UAW is in a labor dispute with American Axle which is negatively impacting GM. ... We are just going to have to wait and see and enjoy the OT rate. We may be needing the money soon enough.

A young part-time temporary worker (PTT) posted a message titled, “Strike for more and work for all the PTT workers!”

Flint assembly should go on strike for more pay and more work for all the ptt workers! We get treated like crap and we can barely make it in this society with the little pay we get and hours. This is the best time now to do it. It would also help the full time seniority people out as well.

Welter replied: “We cannot strike in the middle of an agreement.”

This is not the first time UAW officials have colluded in a strikebreaking operation.

During the 2023 Clarios battery strike near Toledo, Ohio, rank-and-file members challenged Welter over the continued use of batteries from the struck plant. Welter responded that the batteries were “pre-strike inventory” and then invoked federal labor law: “The National Labor Relations Act is clear under ‘hot cargo’ that we have to continue to unload, and this is the direction from the international union.”

During the UAW’s 2022 Constitutional Convention, a largely symbolic resolution to prohibit the handling of parts from struck facilities was defeated, with bureaucrats claiming such a ban would “tie the hands” of the union in negotiations.

The cowardice and complicity of the UAW bureaucracy should be contrasted with the heroic stand of workers at GM’s Silao, Mexico assembly plant, who refused to work overtime producing Silverado and Sierra pickups during the 2019 GM strike in the US. They took this real solidarity action despite retaliation from GM, the gangster-ridden CTM Mexican union bureaucracy and Mexican authorities.

Welter cries crocodile tears over the low pay American Axle workers receive, but the UAW bureaucracy is directly responsible for their destitution. As part of its long-standing “labor-management partnership,” the UAW apparatus deliberately widened the wage gap between parts and assembly workers to boost the competitiveness of the Big Three—a policy that ultimately rebounded on assembly workers themselves.

This included the sellout of the 1998 strike at GM’s Flint Metal Center and Delphi East plants, which was immediately followed by the spinoff of the company’s Delphi division, from which Nexteer emerged. In 2005, Delphi declared bankruptcy and imposed 60 percent wage cuts, with the UAW’s complicity.

In 2008, the UAW shut down an 87-day American Axle strike and

agreed to slash wages from \$29 to \$14.50 an hour. Two-tier structures, first imposed at the Big Three in 2007 and hardened in the 2009 Obama-backed restructuring of GM and Chrysler, followed directly afterwards.

If the bureaucracy has its way, it will confine the American Axle strike to a single plant, end it before it has any impact on GM, and use workers as extras for photo-ops with Democratic Party politicians running for Michigan governor and for the U.S. Senate. Fain will then present whatever rotten deal he gets as a “victory” at the UAW’s 39th Constitutional Convention, which opens June 15 in Detroit.

But these plans have been disrupted by a growing revolt of parts workers against decades of UAW betrayals.

In addition to the rebellion by the Nexteer workers in Saginaw, workers at Bridgewater Interiors in Warren, Michigan, rejected a UAW-backed sellout, yet Local 400 officials have not even called a strike authorization vote.

Earlier this week, Dana workers in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, overwhelmingly rejected a deal recommended by the UAW, which Independents, Parts, Suppliers (IPS) Director Richard Boyer said included “healthy wage increases.” In fact, starting pay is \$20 an hour, and new workers will top out at \$25 an hour after four years. Workers with over five years of seniority will only reach \$28 in June 2029, and there is no cost-of-living adjustment anywhere in the agreement.

The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee has issued an open letter to American Axle strikers calling for united action. The open letter states: “A common strike across parts suppliers would bring the whole industry to its knees. Just-in-time delivery means assembly lines run dry within days.”

The letter outlines concrete measures: refusal to handle parts from struck facilities; united action by assembly and parts workers; parity pay between Big Three and supplier workers; the abolition of tiers, progressions and all other divisions the UAW bureaucracy has used to lower wages and weaken solidarity.

The way forward is through the expansion of rank-and-file committees independent of the union apparatus. Flint Truck workers, American Axle workers, Nexteer workers, Dana workers and workers throughout the auto industry must establish direct lines of communication, share information and prepare coordinated action based on workers’ needs—not what management or the UAW bureaucracy deems acceptable.



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