

Nexteer Saginaw workers express opposition as UAW attempts to push through concessions contract

Our reporters
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On Friday approximately 2,500 auto parts workers at Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan, voted on a second five-year contract proposal. The first Tentative Agreement (TA) in February was voted down by a margin of 85 percent. The outcome of the vote was not yet known at the time of this writing.

A *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* campaign team spoke to Nexteer workers in Saginaw on Friday and distributed a newsletter urging workers to reject the contract proposal and begin discussing the formation of a rank-and-file committee. The newsletter also included the open letter of Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC) at the New River Valley Plant in Dublin, Virginia to UAW International President Rory Gamble, UAW Secretary-Treasurer Ray Curry and UAW Local 2069 President Matt Blondino.

On virtually every major issue, Nexteer workers were handed a rotten contract agreement—no restoration of wages cut from previous contracts nor wage increases that match inflation; an increase for most in health care costs or a further restricting of health care access; maintenance of the hated tier system and continuation of the exploitation of part-time and temporary workers; no end to the grueling “Critical Plant Status” and mandatory overtime; and additional contract language all to management’s favor.

Many of the workers who spoke to *Autoworker Newsletter* reporters expressed anger and bewilderment at yet again being presented with another concessions agreement.

“I voted no because this contract is s...,” a worker angrily exclaimed. “There should be absolutely no part-time workers at a union shop. I’m going on 15 years with this company, and it’s getting worse and worse as time goes on. They say that they’re going to take care of us with the new contract, but I’ve been here too long, and I know how it really works. They’re going to bring in the part-timers to take away hours from us and try to pit us against each other.”

The contract that the UAW is pushing contains inadequate wage increases, which will bring most production workers up to \$21.50 an hour by 2026. Workers on Friday spoke about this

and increased health care costs as well.

Aaron, a worker with 15 years at Nexteer, explained, “They make it seem like you’re getting a raise, but they move stuff around, so we get less every contract. With inflation we’ll be screwed. Cost of living will put us down. Insurance—forget about it. We used to have decent insurance, now it’s terrible. Everything is out of pocket. They [union/management] told me that by 2023 I’ll have a \$1.34 raise, and I’m a skilled tradesman. A \$1.34 raise in two years!”

Another worker said that he was voting “no.” “I don’t think they fought for us. I don’t see much change (from the previous contract workers rejected). I don’t like the pay freeze. I am a specialist making \$22.75, but I still don’t think the pay rate is enough.”

An electrician said angrily, “They wouldn’t let us strike because they said it would hurt GM. But isn’t that the idea? It is our right to strike.

“I am making less here than when I worked at Ford.” He explained he had been forced to leave Ford because of a family situation. “I don’t like the work. I only work here because I need the money.”

A worker named Corey commented, “I am not at all happy with wages here. In six years I will be making \$21 an hour. With inflation and the way the economy is going, with the cost of living going up, that’s not enough. Financially this should be better. The insurance proposal is sad.”

Another worker told the WSWs, “The UAW promotes this ‘retroactive merit pay increase’ along with the signing bonus—as if it is some kind of big gain. That’s money that they owed us already! We already worked for that, with no contract. It shouldn’t have ever been that way in first place.”

A worker said that he had heard of examples similar to Nexteer where the UAW had forced workers back to work without a contract.

“The last contract the international [UAW] jumped in and overrode our local,” he said referring to the 18-hour “Hollywood” strike in 2015.

He told the WSWs that the medical was not an issue for him in the current contract only because he was an ex-military

veteran and already had coverage.

He said the major issue was lack of adequate pay raises and outsourcing. “Nexteer outsourced our stuff, and eventually our jobs went away.

“With the pay raise I am getting I don’t make what I did before the outsourcing in our department. My job was outsourced, and as a result I was reduced to a lower pay grade. After five or six years the money I will be making is still not equal to what I was paid before.”

In attempting to force through the second TA, the UAW is using its typical strong arm tactics. The union had sought to limit discussion, intimidate, confuse and rush it past the rank and file in hopes of securing a “yes” vote. Workers frequently commented on social media about the mafia-like tactics that bargaining chairs used to squash discussion and questions in the so-called “roll-out” meetings held by the UAW on company grounds with factory machines drowning out voices. Shouting matches were reported numerous times, and workers were often only permitted two or three questions at a meeting about a 230-page contract that most of them had received only a few days before they were supposed to vote.

The UAW is also using a signing bonus, a PPO-to-HMO switch bonus, and a token two-point deduction off of an infraction threshold as a means to pressure workers to accept a sellout deal.

Aaron added, “It’s unfortunate they raised our dues. Now they’re going out one by one for embezzlement. They’re not really in my best interests when they’re falling like flies. Hypocrisy going on all the time.”

Asked his response to the formation of a rank-and-file committee, Aaron commented, “I would like to see something better, especially for the young kids coming in. I do not have that fuzzy feeling, seeing this hypocrisy. Something different has to happen. These young kids are getting raked, making them pay for their insurance. It’s going to be used as leverage against us in the future. Dividing and conquering—at least the last four to five contracts I’ve been here.”

Another worker previously cited above also commented on the overall corruption within the UAW. “We have to fight this agreement, just like the Volvo workers did in Virginia. If we don’t put up a fight, the company is going to keep pushing and pushing, and we won’t have a union anymore. Right now I’m for the union, but I also know there are a lot of problems, especially at our plant. We had people walking out of our rollout meeting the other day because they weren’t giving us any information, none of the actual contract language, just the so-called highlights. They weren’t telling us what the company was giving us or what it was taking away. I wanted to walk out myself.”

A worker named Anthony said, “The International isn’t supporting us. I’m not a new hire, but look at what they’re doing to them. To make them pay for benefits is detrimental to everyone. It will be pushed down our throats next. And with the

Alternative Work Schedule [10- to 12-hour schedule without overtime pay]—in the 1930s and 1940s, the working class fought for the eight-hour day. It should be nonnegotiable! Now they are making us work four-12s. It is BS. We need to do something.”

In the run-up to the vote, the UAW has attempted to eliminate and intimidate all opposition to the contract. On Wednesday members associated with the bureaucracy removed WSWS “vote no” statements from the “Saginaw unions no holds bar” Facebook page and removed WSWS Labor Editor Jerry White from the page for challenging the censorship.

On Friday outside the union hall, Local 699 President Tom Hurst and two of his associates approached three *Autoworker Newsletter* reporters distributing newsletters. He forbade them from handing out the newsletter to workers, hypocritically accusing them of trying to tell UAW members how they should vote. Attempting to posture as an impartial defender of a neutral and fair contract vote, Hurst neglected to mention that days earlier his cronies on the bargaining committee had shouted down several workers on the shop floor for asking questions at their rollout meeting.

By contrast most workers were happy to see the *Autoworker Newsletter* and eager to discuss the contract. “I am glad to see you guys out here,” one worker exclaimed.

The WSWS and Socialist Equality Party urge workers to consider the experience of the unending series of betrayals by the UAW, which has overseen a vast decimation of working conditions and living standards in the auto and auto parts industry.

It is necessary for Nexteer workers to follow the example of Volvo workers and other autoworkers, educators and Amazon workers and establish a rank-and-file committee independent of the UAW to take over conduct of their struggle, advance their own demands and forge links with other workers. Workers interested in joining this fight should contact the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*.

To get more information about building a Nexteer rank-and-file committee, e-mail autoworkers@wsws.org or go to www.wsws.org/workers.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact