THE FIGHT AT NEXTEER IS FAR FROM OVER! EXPAND YOUR RANK-AND-FILE COMMITTEE!



BY WILL LEHMAN
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I have been following your fight from the beginning--and I want to be honest with you about what I have seen. Twelve weeks. Three contract rejections--by 96 percent on April 2, by 73 percent on May 15, by 55-45 on May 29. An 86 percent strike authorization vote on May 21, forced out of a bureaucracy that did everything in its power to deny you one. And then, a fourth tentative agreement rammed through by the most fraudulent methods the UAW apparatus could devise on June 26. I know what it feels like to go through something like this. We went through it at Mack Trucks. You have earned the right to assess this experience honestly, draw its lessons clearly, and carry its most important achievements forward.

At every point, the UAW bureaucracy acted not as your representatives but as your enemies. Look at what they did. They extended your contract behind your backs. They declared it illegal to strike. They ignored your 86 percent strike mandate. And when those methods failed, they escalated: announcing a fourth TA that differs in no essential respect from the three you had already rejected--the same poverty top rate of $27 an hour that your predecessors at Saginaw Steering were making in 2005, with the cost of living up over 70 percent since then, the same signing bonus, COLA and profit-sharing gimmicks, the same absence of any protection against the automation cuts coming for hundreds of your jobs.

Then Antwiane Sanders--a worker with more than ten years in that plant--stood up at a June 12 contract rollout meeting held on company property and told UAW International Rep Jason Tuck what he is. Members of the UAW bargaining committee called a supervisor. Let that sink in: the union had a worker fired for opposing the union's contract. I have seen a lot in my years at Mack Trucks. But I want to say plainly what that is. That is not a labor organization. That is a company police force with union dues paying the salaries.

Then came the in-plant vote--overseen by hand-picked supporters of the contract, with newly hired workers permitted to vote before completing their probationary period and fired afterwards. After all of this, the contract passed by only 54-46 among production workers. Think about what that means: after the firing of Antwiane Sanders, after the vote was moved onto company property where every "No" voter could be identified and targeted, after new hires were marched to the ballot under conditions of total job insecurity--they barely got it over the line. A contract ratified under those conditions is not legitimate. It should be regarded as null and void.

WHY WERE THEY SO DESPERATE?

The UAW bureaucracy understands the power you hold and the broader movement your struggle was beginning to ignite. Nexteer workers produce steering components that feed directly into GM, Ford, and Stellantis assembly lines. A real strike at your factory would shut down Big Three production within days. That is why the entire UAW apparatus--that just voted itself raises of $10,000 to $30,000 at the Detroit convention, paraded Democratic politicians on stage like former GM executive Debbie Dingell who voted to ban the railroad strike in 2022 and celebrated Steve Dawes' retirement while he pulled down $229,813 last year--was determined to prevent a strike. Not because it would fail, but because it would succeed.

They feared a walkout would become the catalyst for a far broader movement--Dana workers who have rejected UAW-backed contracts by 90 percent margins, Bridgewater Interiors workers fighting the same fight, American Axle workers whose ten-day strike the bureaucracy strangled on the eve of the convention, giving workers less than 48 hours to review 118 pages of contract language under threats of scab replacement. Their mission was containment. Yours was the opposite.

THE MOST DECISIVE THING YOU BUILT

The bureaucracy warned you repeatedly not to listen to “unauthorized social media”--meaning the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter and the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee. They feared it because it gave your opposition a conscious direction. Without the committee, the spontaneous fury of workers who had voted down a contract by 96 percent would have had no organized form. With it, that fury became a force: exposing each new sellout, warning workers about bureaucratic methods, reaching out to American Axle and Dana workers in a common fight. That is what rank-and-file committees do when they are built correctly--and building them correctly means keeping them independent. Independent of the union bureaucracy, yes. But also independent of both corporate-controlled political parties. The Democrats and the Republicans both serve the corporations. US Senator Debbie Dingell--a former GM executive--was on that convention stage. That tells you everything. The committee answers to the workers, and nobody else. That committee is the most decisive achievement of these twelve weeks. Guard it. Expand it.

You are not the first workers to face this, and you will not be the last. In 2021, Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia voted down three straight UAW-backed contracts--by 91 percent, 90 percent, and again on the third--only to have the bureaucracy wear them down and impose a sellout. That same year, Nexteer workers in Saginaw voted down two contracts before the bureaucracy prevailed. In 2024, Dakkota auto parts workers in Chicago voted down four contracts while the UAW worked hand-in-glove with management to break their strike with lockout threats. And at my own plant, Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania, we voted down the UAW’s sellout deal by 72 percent and went on strike--only to have the bureaucracy force a re-vote under the threat that scabs would replace us. A basic rule of thumb is never underestimate how low the union bureaucracy will stoop to impose the dictates of corporate management. Understanding their playbook is the beginning of beating it.

THE STRUGGLE IS FAR FROM OVER

The bureaucracy wants to sow division--to make young workers blame older ones and vice versa for the outcome. Do not let them. Throughout the course of this three-month struggle you have displayed real solidarity, in the face of everything thrown at you.

Now fight on every front. Demand the immediate reinstatement of Antwiane Sanders with full back pay. Recall and drive out the traitors on the bargaining committee, including those who secured personal transfers to electrician programs paying nearly double the production rate as their reward for delivering this contract. Prepare to fight the impending automation cuts that will eliminate hundreds of jobs under cover of this agreement. A contract “ratified” on the basis of lies, intimidation, and collusion with management is illegitimate--treat it as such.

At the UAW convention in Detroit, I was nominated to run for UAW president because of the fight of rank-and-file workers--including a leading member of the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee, a victimized Dana worker from Warren, Michigan and Big Three workers who share your fight. I am running as a socialist candidate. That word matters. It means I am not running to manage this union more humanely, or to get a seat at the table with GM and Ford and the Democrats who serve them. It means I believe that the working class needs to build its own

independent power--independent of management, independent of the UAW apparatus, and independent of both corporate-controlled political parties. My campaign is not for a seat at Solidarity House. It is for the transfer of power from the bureaucracy to the rank and file, in every factory and every workplace. The rank-and-file committees I am fighting to build will answer to workers, not to the Republicans or the Democrats--not to parties that ban railroad strikes, launch illegal wars and wave the flag while cutting your wages. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees was built for exactly this moment--connecting workers across plants, industries, and borders, turning every factory into a citadel of resistance, including in Mexico, Canada, China and around the world.

Build the committee. Support my campaign. Drive out the traitors. Fight to reinstate Antwiane Sanders. Oppose every victimization. Mobilize against the coming automation cuts. Join the IWA-RFC and expand this movement to every factory and workplace.

The fight is yours to win.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved