NEXTEER WORKERS: VOTE “NO” ON SELLOUT AGREEMENT! ORGANIZE THE RANK AND FILE TO OVERSEE BALLOTING AND PREPARE A STRIKE!



BY WILL LEHMAN
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As the rank-and-file candidate for United Auto Workers president, I urge Nexteer workers in Saginaw to overwhelmingly reject the new four-year tentative agreement in voting this Wednesday and Thursday.

The deal, which contains sweeping concessions—especially targeting new hires—is a provocation and an insult. The fact that such an agreement was even brought to a vote demonstrates the contempt of the company and the union apparatus for the rank and file. Workers must begin organizing now to ensure their democratic will is respected and to prepare for strike action to win what they actually need.

Workers themselves have already identified the "lowlights" of this contract in a flyer which is circulating through the plant. These include:

- Substantial wage cuts for new production hires, who would start at just $19.05 an hour and only rise to $20.89 by 2029—far below the current starting wage of $22.50. As workers correctly point out, this creates an effective "third tier," deepening divisions and driving down standards for everyone.
- Sharp increases in healthcare costs, further cutting take-home pay. A worker with a family of three working full-time would pay $66.34 per week in health contributions. Copays for office visits and medication would rise, while higher seniority workers would see their deductibles double to $3,000 and lose $250 from their Health Reimbursement Arrangement.
- The contract also imposes harsher attendance policies, reducing allowable points from 18 to 12 and doubling penalties for tardiness. New hires would be barred from using accrued sick time for the first 120 days on the job. These are punitive measures designed to intensify exploitation and discipline the workforce.

Voting begins Wednesday morning, and workers are already furious. But anger alone is not enough. There must be vigilance against any attempt by the Local 699 bureaucracy to ram through this deal. In 2021, they declared a deeply unpopular contract ratified by a narrow margin without even releasing a detailed vote breakdown.

Workers must organize rank-and-file oversight of the ballot to ensure its integrity and to enforce the democratic decision of the membership. If the contract is rejected in a free and fair vote, then a strike must immediately be called. The union apparatus has repeatedly used every trick in the book to manufacture its desired outcomes in votes. This pattern has played out again and again: isolating workers from one another, fostering the belief that opposition is futile, and even forcing repeated votes on essentially identical contracts until the desired result is achieved.

At Mack Trucks, where I work, in 2023 we were forced to vote again on a contract we had rejected by 73 percent, only for the bureaucracy to claim it passed by 93 percent the second time.

There are far more of you than there are of the handful of bureaucrats who sit in bed with management. The decisive question is how to use that collective strength. That means taking initiative out of the hands of the apparatus and forming new organizations—rank-and-file committees—composed of and accountable to the workers yourselves. These committees can ensure the integrity of the vote, oversee the counting process, provide a platform for genuine discussion, and prepare for strike action under the direct control of workers.

This struggle must be broadened beyond Nexteer. There must be an appeal for support, especially to Big Three autoworkers, who are themselves facing mass layoffs as

corporations shift the costs of the electric vehicle transition onto workers. Parts workers have long been treated as second-class by the UAW apparatus, but if Nexteer workers take a stand, it will resonate widely with workers. Preparations should be made for joint actions, including the refusal to handle scab components in the event of a strike.

The fight is also global. Nexteer is part of an integrated international production system, with facilities in China, Poland, Mexico, and elsewhere. Workers in all these countries are confronting the same layoffs and attacks. Yet union officials everywhere promote nationalism, blaming "foreign" workers in order to justify their own collaboration with corporate cost-cutting. Workers must reject these divisions and unite on the basis of their common class interests.

Workers are not weak. Strikes are breaking out across multiple industries: healthcare workers, defense workers, refinery workers, and auto parts workers in Findlay, Ohio, as well as a growing wave of strikes in the Mexican auto industry. But this resurgence of class struggle is colliding with the entrenched power of the union bureaucracy.

From the national headquarters—misnamed "Solidarity House"—down to the local unions, the apparatus operates as a dictatorship, beyond the control of the rank and file, while officials draw millions in income financed by workers' dues. They maintain close relations with management, including tens of millions in legal bribes through "joint" programs—and more under the table, which one auto executive in 2015 said is to keep union officials "fat, dumb and happy."

These officials also have direct access to the highest levels of political power. Current UAW president Shawn Fain functioned as a de facto member of the Biden White House and is now offering similar services to the Trump administration.

I am running for UAW president to abolish this bureaucracy, which has betrayed workers for decades. My campaign calls for workers to take back the union by replacing the existing hierarchy with a network of rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled from the shop floor. If elected, I will not take up a position in Solidarity House but will remain a worker on the shop floor.

The basis of this fight is not only for substantial wage increases and the defense of jobs. The goal is for workers to take power. Autoworkers must take the lead in organizing a broader working-class movement against the corporate oligarchy that is driving society toward disaster.

This campaign is about building a movement, not reshuffling positions at the top. The critical issue is not what I will do, but what you will do. Forming a rank-and-file committee at Nexteer is a decisive step in building this growing rebellion from below.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS' POWER!

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

willforuawpresident.org/get-involved