AMERICAN AXLE WORKERS: TAKE THIS FIGHT INTO YOUR OWN HANDS! UNITE WITH NEXTEER AND OTHER PARTS WORKERS!



BY WILL LEHMAN
Mack Trucks worker and rank-and-file candidate for UAW president

I send my unconditional solidarity to the approximately 1,000 members of UAW Local 2093 who have walked out of the American Axle plant — now operating under the name Dauch Corporation — in Three Rivers, Michigan. Your 98 percent strike authorization vote and your decision to take to the picket lines express the accumulated fury of nearly two decades of betrayal. You are fighting not only for yourselves, but for every auto parts worker in the United States and beyond.

Your demands are just and non-negotiable. In 2008, the UAW bureaucracy isolated your 87-day strike and handed the company exactly what it wanted: wages slashed from $29 an hour to $14.50. Eighteen years later, wages at American Axle top out at $22 an hour after a five-year progression — meaning that, adjusted for inflation, you are earning roughly half of what your predecessors made before that catastrophic sellout.

In those same eighteen years, American Axle's CEO collected $111 million in personal compensation. The top five executives pocketed nearly $231 million combined. The company has generated $8.4 billion in profits on the backs of your labor. You have been robbed, systematically and with the active collusion of the UAW apparatus, and you are right to strike to take back what is yours.

You are not alone. Less than two hundred miles to your northeast, 1,300 workers at Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw have now rejected three consecutive UAW-backed sellout contracts. They have voted by 86 percent to authorize a strike. The Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee is building the organizational instrument for workers to take this fight into their own hands. Dana workers, Magna workers, Bridgewater Interiors workers all face contract expirations at this same critical moment.

The conditions for a unified, industrywide uprising of parts workers have never been more ripe. But precisely because the stakes are so high, I must issue a warning: the UAW bureaucracy will attempt to do to you what it has done to every struggle for the past four decades — isolate it, wear it down, and impose a terms-of-surrender agreement dressed up as a victory.

Look at what is happening right now at Nexteer. After an 86 percent strike mandate, the UAW Local 699 bureaucracy defied the democratic will of its own membership, extended the contract behind workers' backs without even a vote, and told them that striking would be "illegal." They brought back a third deal almost identical to the first two, with a cynically front-loaded pay bump designed to exploit workers' economic desperation to squeeze out a yes vote. When that too was rejected, the bargaining committee extended the contract yet again.

The UAW International, from Shawn Fain down to the local officials, has made crystal clear that it has no intention of authorizing a real fight. It is not representing the Nexteer workers — it is policing them on behalf of the company.

This is the pattern, and it will be deployed against you.

In his comments before the strike, UAW Region 1D Director Steve Dawes said "parts workers have been treated as second class cousins for too long." Workers should ask: by whom, Mr. Dawes? Who treated us that way?

As a top officer in UAW Local 651 in Flint, Dawes played a direct role in the betrayal of the 1998 GM strike — a 54-day walkout by 9,200 workers at two Flint parts plants that paralyzed 95 percent of GM's North American production and had the potential to reverse the decades-long erosion of autoworkers' wages and conditions. The UAW bureaucracy reached a settlement that left workers' demands unmet. Less than a week after the strike ended, GM announced the spin-off of Delphi Automotive. Ford followed with Visteon.

By 2003 the UAW had given its institutional blessing to a two-tier wage structure at both companies. And in 2005, Delphi CEO Steve Miller took the company into bankruptcy

and demanded 60 percent wage cuts, the gutting of health benefits, and thousands of job eliminations. The UAW facilitated that verdict too, negotiating buyouts designed to clear out higher-paid veteran workers and make way for a cheap-labor workforce. The plant that became Nexteer — the Saginaw Steering Division, where workers earned $27 an hour in 2005 — went through that entire process of destruction. Twenty years later, $27 an hour is what the UAW is offering as a top rate in 2030.

Steve Dawes, who was paid $229,813 last year, and the UAW apparatus did not just treat parts workers as second-class cousins — they helped manufacture their second-class status, contract by sellout contract.

In his comments, Shawn Fain, who made $276,378 last year, declared: "Your International union has your back." This is no less insulting than Dawes's crocodile tears. Fain was a UAW national negotiator during the 2009 restructuring — the catastrophic concessions agreement that followed directly from the UAW's betrayal of the 2008 American Axle strike and gutted wages and conditions for an entire generation of Big Three workers as well.

As UAW president, Fain's "Stand Up" strike strategy in 2023 kept the vast majority of plants working and was followed by mass layoffs at Stellantis, GM and Ford. When Clarios battery workers struck in 2023 and demanded that UAW members refuse to handle scab parts, the UAW International ordered GM's Flint plant to unload and process those very scab batteries. In 2024, when Dakkota auto parts workers in Chicago went on strike and issued the same appeal, Fain's apparatus again sanctioned the handling of scab parts. This is the deliberate policy of an apparatus that functions not as the representative of workers, but as an instrument of corporate management.

That is why the members of Local 2093 must take the conduct of this struggle firmly into their own hands.

I urge you to act now to form a rank-and-file strike committee — accountable to every worker on every shift, from every tier and every department — to direct this fight. Insist that every company proposal and every counter-offer be reported to the membership in real time. Demand full strike pay of $1,000 per week from the UAW's $840 million strike fund, built from your dues.

Reach out to the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee in Saginaw. Reach out to Dana workers, Magna workers, Bridgewater workers. The just-in-time production system means that a unified strike by parts workers could halt production across General Motors, Ford, and Stellantis within days. That is precisely what the UAW bureaucracy — tied to those corporations by a million threads of labor-management collaboration and institutional self-interest — is desperate to prevent. It is precisely why you must do it.

The demands that should guide this fight are clear and should be non-negotiable: full recovery of all wages lost since 2008, with cost-of-living protections going forward; the abolition of all tiers and an equal, rapid progression to top pay for every worker regardless of hire date; the restoration of company-paid pensions and retiree medical benefits surrendered by the bureaucracy; enforceable limits on speedup and real job security. Labor saving technology must be used to shorten the workweek and increase pay, not throw us out of our jobs. These are not radical demands — they are the minimum required to undo forty years of UAW-administered concessions.

The workers who built the UAW in the great sit-down struggles of the 1930s did not win by appealing to union bureaucrats and corporate-controlled politicians. They won by acting in defiance of them, led by socialist militants organized from the shop floor. Local 2093 members, your moment has come. Take this fight into your own hands, unite with Nexteer workers and your brothers and sisters across the industry, and fight to win.

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

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