

Nexteer workers denounce UAW-company alliance following overwhelming “no” vote

By Eric London
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Sunday’s massive “no” vote by over 3,000 Nexteer workers in Saginaw, Michigan on a contract backed by the United Auto Workers is an overwhelming repudiation of the UAW and another sign of the deep anger and opposition in the working class as a whole.

According to official figures posted by UAW Local 699 on Monday morning, workers rejected the contract by a staggering 3,103 to 80, or 97.5 percent.

The voter turnout at the facility, which employs 3,350 workers, was extremely high—an expression of the determination of workers to register their opposition. It took place the same day as the UAW organized “information meetings” aimed at sugar-coating the deal and pressuring workers to back it.

“This deal is sickening coming from a multi-million dollar company,” one Nexteer worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. “You can’t live on \$12 an hour. You can’t pay \$87 a week on family insurance. The UAW and the company want to give us \$3.85 over four years? Our elected officials behind closed doors are being offered kickbacks to make their lives easier if they get this through.”

The vote at Nexteer—a parts facility that produces critical steering components—follows the mass opposition to similar sellout agreements at the Big Three auto companies, Ford, GM and Fiat Chrysler. The UAW rammed through contracts at all three companies through a combination of lies, intimidation and outright fraud.

The pro-company operations of the UAW culminated in blatant ballot stuffing at Ford, where the UAW secured a miraculous turnaround last month as the contract was heading for defeat, claiming a razor-thin 51 percent margin to pass the deal. The UAW, along with the company and the mass media, have simply ignored widespread charges of fraud and demands for a

recount.

The mass turnout to reject the contract at Nexteer expresses the real relationship between the auto workers and the UAW throughout the industry. The UAW is rightly seen as a pro-company police force comprised of privileged executives who conspire behind the scenes to ensure a continued supply of cheap labor to the auto bosses.

The UAW is now working with corporate executives to plan a strategy to force the deal through.

When asked about widespread hostility to the tentative agreement, UAW Local 699 President Rick Burzynski sought to defend the deal, telling the *Autoworker Newsletter* that “there’s a lot of concessions in different areas” and that “it’s ridiculous to think that you could have a 2,000 page contract, or a 200 page version, without concessions.”

Defending the UAW’s decision to call in police at Sunday’s vote, Burzynski said that “we try to keep order” because “when you get a lot of people together you never know what can happen.”

This statement is a clear expression of the UAW’s role as an agent of management against the workers. Though workers fought hard battles to establish the UAW in the Flint sit-down strike of the 1930s, it is now the UAW’s job to “keep order” on behalf of the corporations, allowing them to exploit the workers for ever higher profits. Their greatest fear is that the workers will get together and fight for their interests.

For its part, the corporation responded to the vote with a statement that “while [the vote] is disappointing, it is a clear message from our employees and one we are considering as we evaluate the strategic options for the Saginaw facility... we stand ready to continue the dialog with our union representatives.”

The reference to the evaluation of “strategic options”

is a threat to close the plant and fire all the workers presently employed. The statement about working with “our union representatives” is telling. Indeed, the UAW is “theirs”—it belongs to the company and not the workers.

Nexteer workers are looking for a way to wage a real fight against the corporate-UAW alliance. Many have been writing in to the *World Socialist Web Site* expressing their hostility to the contract.

“We cannot take an insurance hit,” wrote the wife of a Nexteer worker. “To be able to keep what we have now, it will cost us \$400 per month. And my husband has to work an hour over every day. He comes home dragging every day. They have him doing a job that is normally a three person job—either he does it or he gets written up, with the possibility of being walked out. Most of all I would like to stress—This is not the union my daddy had! This is a good old buddy club.”

A current Nexteer worker wrote, “Local 699 has lied and deceived the employees at Nexteer.”

Another Nexteer worker added, “I think America has made a turn for the worst. The wages at Nexteer are at poverty levels and the company wants them to stay there. People are out here hurting and struggling to make ends meet, and they shouldn’t be. They are working for a multi-million dollar company.”

In their fight against the UAW-corporate alliance, Nexteer workers have the support of workers across the US and internationally.

“I support Nexteer workers,” a Flint GM worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. “I’m just waiting to see how the UAW tries to ram it through. Nexteer workers: stick to your guns and don’t trust the UAW because they sure don’t seem to have our best interest at heart. That’s a sad thing, but I’d like to see some sort of alternative committee get formed here.”

Referring to the *Autoworker Newsletter*, the Flint worker added: “You guys are saying something that needs to be heard. Nobody in the *Free Press* or the *Detroit News* defends the workers. You guys ask the workers on the floor what they think.”

A Nexteer worker said, “Your articles are outstanding. I usually don’t sign up for stuff online but I had to sign up.”

“We are all in this together,” he added, addressing autoworkers across the world. “We’re fighting for a cause, for a livelihood and a wellbeing for everybody

as a whole. We’re human beings too, just like you are.”

The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* calls on Nexteer workers to immediately form a rank-and-file factory committee to discuss and plan the next steps in the fight against the company and its stooges in the UAW.

The *WSWS* will do everything it can to assist workers in coordinating opposition and contacting auto workers at GM, Ford and FCA. Contact us by signing up for the *Autoworker Newsletter* at www.wsws.org/autoworkers.

To contact the *WSWS* and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>