

“It’s our time”: US autoworkers denounce UAW corruption, vow to fight as contract deadline approaches

By our reporter
3 September 2019

With the contract deadline for more than 150,000 US autoworkers at Ford, General Motors and Fiat Chrysler less than two weeks away, workers are determined to beat back employer demands for concessions and win important gains.

The continuing exposure of rampant corruption in the leadership of the United Auto Workers has only heightened workers’ resolve to fight. This has been expressed by near-unanimous strike authorization votes by workers at plants across the US.

FBI agents raided the home of UAW President Gary Jones last week. This followed the indictment of Michael Grimes, the former top aide to UAW Vice President for General Motors Cindy Estrada. Grimes is accused to taking nearly \$2 million in kickbacks for the manufacture of union promotional materials.

Workers contacted by the WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* expressed anger over the continuous demands by management for cuts despite booming profits. They pointed to the abuse of temporary part time (TPT) workers who have no contract rights and no guaranteed path to regular employment.

A worker at the Ford River Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan said, “At least 45 percent of this place is made up of TPTs. I’m a TPT myself. I’ve been a TPT for three years, and many of us have been TPTs for multiple years. It forces me to work two jobs. We only get a guarantee of 30 hours; 40 hours when it is offered based on a call list.

“This year’s contract is my first. We deserve a lot more; it’s not just Ford, its Chrysler and GM. This used to be the backbone of the state and the cities here. It used to be the main income for a lot of people; now you have jobs competing with autoworkers. It’s not the

same like when my dad and my uncles worked here.

A senior worker at Fiat Chrysler Belvidere Assembly Plant in northern Illinois also spoke to the *Autoworker Newsletter*. Earlier this year the second shift was laid off at the facility, forcing many workers to transfer to distant plants to keep working. “I have been in for 35 years, and it’s always about what are we going to give up, even though these companies make billions in profits.”

“They say that our vehicle has ‘the most American parts;’ well I don’t care about that, what does that have to do with me? JD Power Associates...all these industry awards that the companies just hand themselves mean nothing to me.”

“How come they [UAW executives] have these meetings in Las Vegas, Florida or California? Why not at the union house or that retreat that workers paid for?” he asked, referring to the luxurious Black Lake conference center owned by the UAW.

Remarking on the recent sentencing of former UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell to prison for his role in the UAW corruption scandal he added, “How can someone do that? I doubt that [former UAW Vice President Norwood] Jewell will even be in for 15 months.”

“I heard that the UAW even paid for his lawyer, how messed up is that? He steals from us, and we have to pay to get him off the hook.”

The WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* also spoke this week to workers at the Fiat Chrysler Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) north of Detroit.

Roy, a temporary part-time worker at SHAP for two years, said: “The union is covering up a lot of stuff. I disagree with it entirely. When it comes down to it, it is

bribery. The union is broken, this [the FBI raids] is big news, and they are just trying to cover up their tracks. They are telling us, take what you are given and that's all you're going to get.

"They do the TPTs wrong, they write up a lot of us. We were supposed to be rolled over to full-time work, and then they pulled it. It really affected me because I was working a second job. I gave them notice [to quit], then FCA pulled the full-time position. Well over 300 of us were affected; it was October 17, 2018. The union does not fight for us.

"In 2015 the contract was voted down because the workers wanted to make the TPTs full-time. I didn't know about that vote.

"Now I make only \$15.78/hour with a .66 shift differential for second shift and only get basic Blue Cross/Blue Shield with a high deductible and no dental for 3-5 years. Most places can only keep you as a TPT for a limited time, but here they can keep you as long as they want."

Two young SHAP workers, formerly TPTs but now full-time, spoke to the WSWS. One said, "We need to strike. We have to shut it down. If we don't, we won't get what we need. We need pensions, we need cost of living. They took our pensions away in 2011; we haven't had COLA for 20 years. We need better healthcare and to get rid of the terrible TPT system."

His friend said, "The way they treat the TPTs is terrible. It's corruption all down the line in the union. That last contract was bull. You have to wait eight years for full pay.

"The way they treat you as a TPT if you have a health problem, you're in trouble. And if you get injured, that's it, you have no protection whatsoever."

"We all feel the same way," added his coworker. "We don't want to strike, but we feel we have to. We don't want them to feel we just have to take it."

Another Ford Rouge worker said, "People lost faith in the union." Referring to the corruption scandal, he added, "People always felt like something was going on because how can you be a union official and not be there for workers? You tell workers being laid off to take the buyout, how can you as a union official tell someone to take the buyout?"

"Why am I paying union dues? Back in the day, the union was good. Why can't we afford the cars we make? No union official from the Big 3 drives a piece

of shit car, why can't we drive the same decent cars to get to work? Why aren't they making sure people can get to work?"

"Ford here makes their money through other means rather than producing cars. You don't provide any support for workers who are struggling but then you are on them when they are late to work. There are single parents that work here trying to survive. 'Oh you've been working here more than six years no deal for you getting a new car for work.'

"It's not about black, white, it's all about money and power. It's my time, it's our time to fight. The generations before me, they fought for some of the things we have now. People died to get the things we have now. We're not asking for anything except the things that they [Management and UAW] took away."

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