Letter from a GM worker on the Rouge explosion

"The UAW allows management to play Russian roulette with the lives of workers"

16 February 1999

To the Editor:

The Ford Rouge tragedy is an example of what happens when the UAW allows management to play Russian roulette with the lives of workers. It is no secret that the union leadership collaborates closely with management to cut costs and enhance corporate profits. Workers should question the effectiveness of joint labor-management committees and Ford's safety record. There exists a history which is marked by numerous explosions at this facility. I believe the elimination of jobs in the Power House and reduction of preventative maintenance are connected to the company's relentless drive to increase profits.

The deterioration of working conditions is a problem that is prevalent among UAW-represented workers within the auto industry. The union implemented a joint labor-management structure that operates outside the grievance procedure. Committee members who represent workers are appointed rather than chosen democratically by their peers. This system fails to address specific worker complaints about health and safety issues. Instead of filing legitimate grievances, committeemen routinely channel workers to a local joint health and safety committee that employs a consensus-competitive model of problem solving. Rather than resolving problems encountered by workers on the job, the procedure delays and hinders constructive action.

The hypocrisy of this system is revealed when the union bureaucracy feels threatened. Public condemnations of the company's safety record are aired and an avalanche of grievances suddenly appear. Then the importance of addressing safety violations is used as bargaining leverage to achieve the union's objectives.

Workers deserve timely action in response to their complaints concerning hazardous working conditions. Their health and lives should never be jeopardized to fatten corporate purses. If the facts ever surface, both the UAW and Ford will have blood on their hands.

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