

Explosion at the Rouge plant

## United Auto Workers officials cover up for Ford management

Jerry White  
3 February 1999

Ford workers' suspicions that a joint investigation by the United Auto Workers and Ford management would not reveal the truth behind Monday's explosion at the Rouge complex were confirmed by a press conference held Tuesday morning.

Since the fatal blast, UAW officials have gone out of their way to discourage any notion that there could be a conflict of interests between the workers and the company. The union cancelled its own press conference scheduled for Tuesday morning at the Local 600 union hall, and instead held a joint news conference with Ford management.

Ron Gettelfinger, the UAW's international vice-president in charge of relations with Ford, used the press conference to absolve the company of any responsibility for the explosion, excluding the possibility that safety violations had contributed to the tragedy. He did so before the investigation had even commenced.

Gettelfinger began his comments by thanking members of the Ford family for personally taking part in an internal meeting with union officers that morning. He acknowledged that Ford had discussed the resumption of production at the Rouge complex, but defended the company. "Ford Motor Company has never raised the issue of production throughout this crisis. They have dealt with the human side of this story and I want to applaud Ford Motor Company."

During the question period this reporter asked if Ford's cost-cutting and downsizing had resulted in an erosion of safety protections that might have contributed to the disaster. Gettelfinger responded, "I don't think there has been an erosion of safety. We have productivity committees and health and safety

committees and we work these things out internally. Ford has opened up the door to us. When there is cost-cutting, Ford's concern has always been with the people impacted."

When I asked Gettelfinger how any Ford worker could accept the integrity of an investigation carried out jointly by the union and management, the UAW officer responded, "I don't understand your question. We negotiate the health and safety of our members. We have an obligation to do that. There is no conflict between helping the company become more productive and the health and safety of our members. If we have differences with the company over this, we negotiate it."

Ford's site manager for the Rouge complex, Art Janes, added: "We have more safety engineers and UAW safety committees than ever before. The state will also come in if any employees suspect that something is not right."

The management representative had only praise for the union. "We are working with the union to resolve this crisis," he said, "and to keep our operations running."



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**