

Autoworkers speak out: Louisville, Kentucky Ford worker denounces UAW-company alliance

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On Tuesday, autoworkers at the Louisville Assembly plant in Kentucky will vote on whether to authorize a strike against Ford Motor Company. Roughly 4,500 autoworkers are employed at the plant, producing the Ford Escape and Lincoln MKC. An additional 5,000 autoworkers are employed across town at Ford's Kentucky Truck Assembly plant, where workers build F-250 to F-550 trucks, the Ford Expedition, and the Lincoln Navigator.

Over the last week thousands of autoworkers have voted by margins of 97-99 percent to authorize strike action against the "Big Three" auto companies of GM, Ford, and Fiat Chrysler.

Ford has posted near-record profits over the course of the last year. According to a recent report from the industry web site autonews.com, Ford's second quarter profits are "its best automotive profit since 2000," with the company's net income rising 44 percent in the quarter.

The report notes that Ford's massive profits are the product of "lower costs"—i.e. the increased exploitation of Ford workers. In its efforts to drive up profits at the expense of autoworkers, Ford is aided by its accomplice, the United Auto Workers.

According to the 2015 book "Inside the Ford-UAW Transformation," co-written by UAW official Dan Brooks, Ford officer Martin Mulloy, and Joel Cutcher-Gershenfeld, "None of the other auto companies have been as comprehensive or as successful in moving to more flexible and competitive work practices."

How does the company do it? According to the authors, "Ford does it on a joint basis with the UAW."

If autoworkers want to examine the pro-company character of the UAW and its incestuous relationship

with Ford, they will find numerous examples straight from the mouths of union bureaucrats and company agents in the pages of this book, which, according to its authors, tracks "the transformation of the UAW into a modern business partner."

Part of the UAW's efforts to aid its corporate "business partners" involves the suppression of opposition among workers to the union-company alliance and the preparation of further concessions and sell-outs. The union is currently holding "information sessions" like one held Sunday in Louisville. One autoworker told the *World Socialist Web Site* that union bureaucrats used the information sessions to denounce the *Autoworker Newsletter* and WSWS campaign teams.

The WSWS is publishing the following comments from a Louisville Assembly autoworker, while withholding the worker's identity to prevent possible retribution.

"I came here from Sandusky [Ohio] Automotive Component Holdings and it's been hell ever since. It's almost like they try to keep you down to where you can't live and can't survive. I have friends who sold their homes and left their families to come down here and try to make it. As for myself, it's getting bad to the point where if nothing happens during this contract I'll probably end up having to get a second job. It's been rough all the way around. I was living out of a motel for a while and I lost my seniority coming here.

"It can be dangerous work. My hand blew up like a boxing glove. I had three bolts I had to hold with one hand and I couldn't do it. My union quality guy said 'just try to do it.' I ended up going on medical that night.

“I missed a couple of days for personal reasons and I was locked out by the company. The contract says missing two days within 90 days can mean a lockout, but I was out of my 90-day range. The union said ‘we did everything we could, we tried for three hours to get you out of this,’ and I said ‘It took you three hours to count to 90 days?’

“They made me sign off on all back pay and made me take a deal that says I can’t have an infraction for a year. The union told me ‘you’re lucky you’ve got a damn job.’ I’ve heard that over and over again—it’s what they tell everyone. When I went to see the district committeeman, he was on the phone with somebody else yelling at them, ‘you’re lucky you’ve got a job!’

“The union sits in their air conditioned offices and they take breaks whenever they want, but when the management sends us to an early break when they don’t have the parts, we have to work for hours in a row later in the day. My job is physical, so four straight hours of doing your job is tough. I’ve never seen the union step in and say ‘this is BS.’

“I asked my committeeman to present a copy of the contract. I want to read the whole thing and not just the highlights. I want to vote with knowledge.

“If the contract doesn’t go the way we want it to go, a lot of people are going to stop paying their union dues. I sent a letter to [UAW President] Dennis Williams asking him for my dues back. I sent it first class mail so he would have to sign off on it. I never heard back.

“People wonder why certain things happen in the plant and the union doesn’t take care of it. A lot of people are feeling that the union has their heads up management’s butt, to put it politely.

“For example, there was a girl in the union hall who asked the union a legitimate question, and the union guy said ‘don’t question my F--ing authority.’ And that really pissed me off.

“There was also a guy who got hit by a forklift and the union didn’t shut the line down. As soon as they figure out the guy’s hurt, they stopped the line for a minute, but when they whisked him off, the next thing you know the line’s back up and going again. If I fall down from heat exhaustion the joke we tell is that I’m just going to get sent down the assembly line because the union won’t stop production.

“I think it would be a good idea to have rank-and-file

committees of workers because the union can’t do even the simplest things. We need to figure out another avenue to be able to take care of some of these issues.

“Taking over the government and the banks and corporations sounds nuts, but when you’re living this life, it’s not. I’ve crossed a threshold of being the sheep going along with the program. The union doesn’t help me and they make me out to look like some kind of bad guy.

“I never used to put a tab on what I would call myself, but after reading what you guys are all about I think I’m a socialist.”



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