

Dictatorship conditions at Ford's Kansas City Assembly Plant: Part Two

With UAW complicity, Ford fires workers for voicing opposition

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This is the second in a two-part series on working conditions at Ford's Kansas City Assembly Plant. Part one is posted [here](#).

Conditions at the Kansas City Assembly Plant resemble a dictatorship in which workers are fired for posting comments online. Workers at the KCAP plant forwarded to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* an article by UAW Local 249 Bargaining Chair Todd Hillyard, who writes:

“The company has been watching social media sites for a long time now and while I know many people don't think about it you can get yourself in trouble posting things on sites thinking nobody else will see them. We have had a least [sic] a dozen members terminated for posting inappropriate things or threats on social media sites.”

Hillyard's response is to berate workers for daring to exercise their rights to freedom of speech.

“Stop and think before you do something that could cost you your job. Once something is put out there and gets in the wrong hands it can't be taken back.”

Hillyard's insultingly paternal tone does not hide the fact that he is issuing a threat. It is likely not only the company who monitors social media sites. Many workers believe it is the UAW that helps the company target and fire the most outspoken workers.

A worker at KCAP, Alex, told the WSWS, “A Local 249 official told me there's a person in Michigan whose job it is to monitor social media. Here at KCAP we have a Facebook page and I've heard there was one person who was fired for wearing a t-shirt that was derogatory to [UAW Ford Department VP] Jimmy

Settles.”

When asked about the firings, Ford Global News Manager Mike Moran said, “I'm not familiar with that, and I don't know any information about it.”

Alex said the firings prove that autoworkers have no rights on the factory floor. “It's like a dictatorship—the company says you can't post anything they don't like and there is no freedom of speech in the workplace. And the bargaining chairman writes this article saying the company is monitoring social media, but I've also heard that if someone gets fired, the UAW will get their job back but will agree to tear up a number of pending grievances so that they just disappear.”

Chris, another KCAP worker, said, “I have seen people talking about the firings and my issue is it should be innocent until proven guilty. They say people were fired for ‘bigotry’ or for making workers feel uncomfortable. How can you prove that? We have constitutional freedom of speech, so why can they just override that?”

“And what really gets peoples' blood boiling in the plant is that the UAW-Ford negotiating team took a vacation to Florida after the contract went through. There are lots of negative feelings here over us getting sold out and them going to Miami to celebrate. After 12 years we got a measly 87 cent raise, and the UAW says Ford can't afford to give anything back, despite the fact that they have \$9 billion in profits.”

Workers also explained how the UAW acts like a policeman over the workers. Workers regularly call the UAW “a company policeman” and note that their representatives have the power to give workers unpaid

days off for violating company procedure.

Moreover, Alex described the “Ford Production System” process “where the UAW members can take a job where they’re actually just ancillary foremen, and it’s their job to make sure that the workers do their job. The company uses this as a pool to pull new salaried personnel out of. It’s like what I was reading in the WSWS about what the German union IG Metall does with the companies.

“But the UAW operates like organized crime. When they raise your dues without your consent, that’s extortion. When they give their money to the Democratic Party, that’s bribery. The UAW is a criminal organization.”

“One thing you’ve got to understand when you work out here is that we refer to it as a prison. I refer to it as a forced labor camp. Without being out there on the job you can’t support your family, you’ve got to take what they offer, so its like a prison. You can’t get out of it. The only thing you could hope for was an 8-hour day, but those don’t exist at Ford. When you work there that’s all they want you to do. It messes with your life and breaks up a lot of marriages. It’s like slavery didn’t really disappear.”



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