

“They chew you up and spit you out”

Ford workers in Chicago speak out on UAW corruption

Our reporters
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Workers at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant (CAP) spoke to a *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* reporting team about the ongoing corruption scandal enveloping the United Auto Workers (UAW), as well as the brutal conditions they face daily in the plant, enforced by the UAW on behalf of Ford.

Many Ford workers said they had heard about the federal investigation and were outraged that UAW officials took more than \$1.5 million in payments from Fiat Chrysler (FCA) to ram through company-friendly contracts. While indictments have so far been limited to management and union officials at Fiat Chrysler, investigations are currently underway into joint program centers the UAW runs together with GM and Ford.

While the UAW has denied that the bribes affected the contract negotiations, the entire contract process in 2015 was rigged against workers. After FCA workers rejected the first contract, the UAW used lies and intimidation to ram through contracts at FCA, GM and finally at Ford, where workers alleged ballot stuffing was employed to get the contract passed with a razor-thin margin of 51 percent.

A worker with three years at Chicago Assembly, who did not want to give her name, said, “I’m not surprised at all [about the corruption in the UAW]. I joined right before the 2015 contract passed. I thought the contract in 2015 was bogus and they pushed it through in Dearborn. If the union is getting bribes, the whole thing is crooked.”

Kim, a worker with six years at Chicago Assembly, said, “I thought the contract was BS, especially with what’s happening with the TPT (Temporary Part-Time) workers. How could they negotiate it? And then all that

in-progression stuff? What was that all about? They basically just created more tiers instead of getting rid of them.

“The union is in bed with management and taking bribes. The contracts are not for us—it’s for Ford’s profits. I think these contracts should be declared null and void as you said. They get bribes and they do what the company wants. They gave everyone a lump sum of money to get it passed [in 2015]. Our union dues go up and they don’t represent us on the floor. And then there’s all this sexual harassment that the union is hush-hush about.”

Kim also spoke about the ruthless sweatshop labor conditions workers endure at the plant, with the union recently calling for mandatory overtime after a breakdown in production. “They’ve been calling mandatory 11.5 hours, which is apparently part of the contract. This is the second week we’ve been doing this. You’re exhausted every day. Forget the 8-hour day, we do a 10-hour day minimum. I just know the union isn’t for workers.”

Agustin, a recent TPT at Chicago Assembly, spoke about the UAW corruption scandal and the 2015 contract negotiations. He noted, “What I’ve heard and what I’ve seen is they screwed a lot of people over.”

“As far as the TPTs go, I’ve heard that was all because of the contract [in 2015]. It was all about the money for the company and the union. They treat us horribly. They chew you up and spit you out.”

Speaking about the UAW, he added, “They don’t have our best interests at heart. It’s all about the money. We should really fight for what we deserve. The only way we can achieve gains is if we stick together. I would like to know who will come together

outside of work. I agree that we also need a party of the working class.”

Ford made \$8.4 billion in adjusted pretax profit in 2017, down from \$10.3 billion in 2016. While workers are forced by the UAW to endure mandatory overtime at the whim of the company, Ford has stated it will pay out more than \$3 billion in dividends to shareholders this year.

About the overtime enforced by Local 551, Ken noted, “I need the extra money, but many of us are wondering why this is happening. Questions don’t get answered at all by the union. It’s like how it is everywhere though. We at the bottom keep getting pushed to the bottom and the rich get richer. We need a strategy for workers. Our strength is in numbers.”

A first-tier worker named Derek with more than 5 years at Chicago Assembly said, “The place is like a slave camp. That’s what it is.” He said he had heard about the corruption scandal and was not surprised by the news.

In response to the demand raised by the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that contracts from 2015 should be declared null and void in light of the UAW corruption scandal, Will responded, “Maybe the ones who, workers like me, that feel like we didn’t get anything good from the deal can restructure and move towards our desired outcome.”

Will said the twelve-hour shift that is being imposed at the plant should be voluntary. “We are all tired. Some of us need the money but some don’t care to be here but have to stay here.”

He also spoke about the exploitation of the TPTs. “I think they promise them after 90 work days they will be crossed over and every 89th day they start them back over from square one and they don’t get any of the profit sharing. I don’t think that’s right. I know part-time workers that have been part-time workers for two years or more. They work the same work we do, or they used to. Now they are down to three workdays a week.”

Another worker, who did not want to be identified, spoke out against the UAW and the conditions TPT workers face. He said, “I think the UAW is extremely corrupt. I think they are also running a scam with the TPT workers. They hang out a prospect of permanent employment, but it’s all a ruse. They’re just being used. Eventually [Ford] will just get rid of them and I think that cruel. It’s unconscionable. I feel bad for

those guys. I was lucky enough to get in because I started long ago.”

“I think the two-tier system should also be abolished. When people come in they should be treated just like full-time employees. They should make at least \$24-\$25 and be able to work up to more. But not \$16 and some change. You can make the same at White Castle. Making \$16 an hour is hardly a living wage.”

The worker added that he agreed with the demands of the *Autoworker Newsletter*: “ I agree. Especially abolishing the tiers. The UAW has conceded too much. I work at Ford and I can’t *afford* a Ford.

“It’s apparent that corruption is running from the top to the bottom. The UAW made a pretty penny; the greed has no bounds.”



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