

Autoworkers speak out against UAW corruption, voice support for Kokomo Fiat Chrysler workers

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The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* spoke with autoworkers in Chicago and Kokomo, Indiana about the corruption scandal which has wracked the United Auto Workers, now reaching the top of the ladder in the reported naming of former UAW President Dennis Williams as the official who authorized the illegal transfer of funds through the joint training centers for expenses including resort fees and lavish meals. Funds from the UAW-Chrysler National Training center were siphoned into the pockets of UAW officials in return for forcing through concessions contracts in 2009, 2011 and 2015.

In reaction to these revelations US autoworkers are speaking out against the corrupt, pro-corporate policies of the UAW, which have been laid out for all to see as the details of the corruption scandal unfold. During the same week that Williams was named in the scandal, workers at Fiat Chrysler Automobile's Kokomo and Tipton, Indiana, transmission plants voted almost unanimously to authorize strike action in balloting held on July 19 and 20.

The vote expressed the growing anger and hostility of workers at the Kokomo plants toward the corporation, which has imposed the super-exploitation of low-paid Temporary Part-Time (TPT) workers, the pushing of older workers into early retirement, and unsafe working conditions. However, on the part of the UAW, the strike vote is a maneuver aimed at allowing workers to vent their anger while union officials work out a rotten deal behind the scenes.

The UAW helped to engineer an assault on working conditions that created the \$3.5 billion in profits that FCA netted in 2017. In exchange, UAW officials have been rewarded handsomely. Across the US, the UAW

has betrayed workers time and again over the past several decades, including the courageous nine-month lockout of Honeywell workers in South Bend, Indiana, which the union ended by pushing through a concessions contract on February 25 of 2017. The deal included language that allowed the company to strip retirees of healthcare benefits.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls for the workers at the Kokomo plants to make a clean break from this rotten organization, and to establish rank-and-file committees to formulate their own demands, basing themselves on what they as workers need. As the *Autoworker Newsletter* in an appeal to Kokomo transmissions workers on July 30 raised demands including rank-and-file control over negotiations, for all bribery-tainted contracts to be declared null and void, an end to the tier system and for all workers to be converted to full-time pay, the abolition of the alternative work schedule, and for workers' control over production in the plants.

At Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, workers report that the corruption scandal is a frequent topic of conversation. "I was talking to some coworkers just last week about this," a worker with over 25 years told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*. "They got the top guy [Williams] now, they got him implicated. I remember in 2015, we were all voting 'no' and the contract wasn't doing well, and then it got to Dearborn and somehow passed."

"Every month it's somebody else [implicated]. At the constitutional convention, it was shameful that they voted to keep the dues the same supposedly to build up the strike fund. We know they're not going to strike."

He expressed his agreement with the *Autoworker*

Newsletter's call to build rank-and-file committees. "We need to do something before next year. There are so many people I work with trying to get to back what we lost."

A worker at one of Fiat Chrysler's Kokomo, Indiana, transmission plants spoke about the 2015 sellout contracts. "First we voted one terrible contract proposal down, and then we voted down the second one too. How that vote count came to be what it was, I don't know. I don't know anyone that's happy, no one is."

"Concessions of any kind—people are done with them. And a raise that doesn't keep up with inflation or the cost of living? That's not a gain. It's a complete 180 from what things should be."

He expects that during the 2019 contract negotiations, the UAW will "come out with next to nothing, like they did in 2015. You'll get that highlight page that doesn't tell you anything. They might throw in a bonus or two. They'll say, 'You have to take a pay cut, or you'll lose your job.' If they're going to take your job somewhere else, they're going to do it."

He agreed with the call for rank-and-file committees and rejected claims that the UAW could be pressured somehow to represent workers. "We've got to be able to coordinate and get things going on our own. I've seen UAW apologists on Facebook saying you can't do anything without the UAW. But it's like the Democratic Party. You're not going to reform it."

"We've got to be able to rebel against and move against the UAW, or we're going to be sold out again."

Rich, a second-tier autoworker at Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, spoke out against UAW officials' acceptance of the bribes funneled through the joint training centers to grease the wheels of the concessions contracts forced onto FCA workers in 2015.

"They are all crooked. They work hand in hand with the companies. They've said we could be forced to work two jobs and that we can't refuse. They pushed through the last contract and threatened us with our jobs if we did not vote on it—they said it was for job security—but I didn't believe any of that. They already stopped making the Lincoln here, and they laid off a shift. Now, if they stop making the Ford Explorer at our plant, they'll lay off another shift."

He spoke about his thoughts toward the building of a rank-and-file committee at the plant and shared ideas for workers' demands. "For a rank-and-file committee,

you will need more than just a few people to support it. You will need support from the majority of workers."

"For demands, I would say the first thing we would ask for would be to eliminate mandatory overtime. We have 10-hour shifts, every day we work for over 10 hours. We are forced to come in on weekends and days off. Second thing would be to demand safer working conditions. Once, we were forced to work with toilet water leaking from a crack in the ceiling onto our heads because the union told us that there was nothing that they could do to get it fixed. And the third thing we would ask for would be for respect from supervisors toward employees."

Autoworkers across the US are demanding an end to the control over their lives by the UAW and the corporations. They demand the right to full-time wages and shorter working hours, healthcare, a safe workplace, and an end to layoffs, plant closures and endless restructuring.

New organizations of struggle are needed to wage the fight for these demands and workers themselves must build them. We call on autoworkers across the US and the world to voice their support for the Kokomo transmission workers and to form rank-and-file committees that will link up their struggles with autoworkers across the US and the world.



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