

UAW, Ford enforce punitive attendance policies at Chicago Assembly Plant ahead of September contract expiration

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In advance of the expiration of the national contract agreement between the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the Detroit automakers, Ford is enforcing punitive attendance policies on workers at Chicago Assembly, citing in particular supposed abuse of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

FMLA was enacted under the administration of President Bill Clinton and gives workers the right to take up to 12 weeks unpaid time off to deal with a variety of family issues. As employers have eliminated such things as sick days and paid personal days workers have been more and more forced to fall back on FMLA to deal with emergencies.

Recent postings on the UAW Local 551 Facebook page indicate the growing anger of workers at management harassment and the complicity of union officials in victimizing workers. Despite the attempts by the UAW at censorship, many critical comments have been posted online.

In a July 17 Facebook post, Local 551 Chairman Alan “Coby” Millender called on workers at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant to attend a State of the Union Town Hall meeting scheduled for July 24 to “share some concerns that can make or break our futures here at [Chicago Assembly Plant]” and “speak on what must be improved to help secure our futures and our current state.”

He concluded the post by explicitly stating that workers would not be allowed to raise questions at the meeting: “This Town Hall will ONLY be a State of the Union Address from your Chairman and not a question/answer forum open for debate.”

Following the meeting a number of workers posted comments expressing concern that work conflicts had

prevented many from attending and asked that information of what took place at the meeting be reported.

“I couldn’t make time to be at the meeting, so I can’t speak to what was said. Everyone is just keeping really quiet about it at the plant,” a CAP worker told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*.

One Ford worker sent a message to the *Autoworker Newsletter* on behalf of another worker who attended the Town Hall meeting, writing, “Our Chairman conducted Town Hall meetings 7-24-19 to tell us that people with FMLA [Family and Medical Leave Act] is a problem ‘and the company and I [Coby Allen] (are) coming after those individuals with FMLA.’ Workers can’t speak up in fear of retaliation.”

On the Local 551 Facebook page those replying on behalf of the UAW repeated phrases like, “It was made crystal clear at the meeting not to discuss some things on the internet” and “Attend the next meeting if you want to know.”

Criticizing the dismissive attitude of a UAW official toward workers’ questions, one commenter wrote, “Kevin Ballard, [that is] not a good attitude from someone just elected. Someone wants info and you should help if you want voted back in. ...Union brothers and sisters should help inform each other. You’re a union brother AND a representative and you take that attitude by saying yeah come to the next one instead of offering some information like all these others did. You lost my vote for next election.”

Warning about management harassment, one worker wrote, “They are writing people up for everything! I know this because I was one of 10 today. I had my cell phone in my hand, wasn’t on it but still in my hand.

Other ppl got safety glasses, some got missing parts. No joke ppl beware!"

Another wrote: "Coby spoke to attendance quite a bit...they plan to start cracking down on that and anything and everything else they can to hold people accountable."

The harsh discipline and crackdown on attendance are a part of a plan by Ford and the UAW to intimidate workers in advance of a possible strike in September over the contract.

Ford recently announced that CAP will add 450 new temporary positions at an unspecified future date, after converting 450 workers currently in temporary part-time (TPT) positions to full-time. This is after Ford hired 500 new workers at the plant earlier this year, and said it will bring the total number of workers at the plant to 5,200.

TPT workers begin at just over \$15 per hour at CAP, nearly half of what full-time "legacy" workers are paid for doing the same work. They have no job protections or benefits, and yet the union continues to take dues out of their paychecks. To add insult to injury, these workers are not eligible for FMLA.

Under the Short-Term and Long-Term Supplemental categories, additional tiers that were created in previous contracts, new layers of workers have been created with no job protections who still must pay union dues.

The creation of new categories of temporary workers is part of the divide-and-conquer tactics of the UAW, which pit workers against each other within the plants and against their brother and sister autoworkers all over the world.

All workers in the plants, whether they are legacy, full-time or otherwise, despise the multi-tier system in effect. However, the UAW has no intention of fighting to abolish these divisions, which it played a crucial role in implementing.

For their part Ford and other automakers are running full production, apparently in an attempt to build up inventories of best selling and profitable models in advance of the September contract deadline.

As contract negotiations proceed workers need to carefully consider the UAW's record of betrayal. After workers at CAP and other Ford assembly plants voted down the 2015 sellout agreement negotiated by the UAW, the union declared the contract narrowly ratified based on the results of a hotly disputed vote at

Dearborn Truck . The recent hiring announcement by Ford and it promise to bump TPT workers into full-time positions should be seen as a ploy to entice overexploited and often young workers to take an otherwise rotten deal in return for perceived job security.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calls on workers to form rank-and-file committees to take the contract fight out of the hands of the UAW. These committees would formulate demands based on what autoworkers need and want, not the profit demands of Ford. These committees should form links with other factories and prepare strike action in coordination with other sections of the working class throughout the US and internationally.

Against the ongoing destruction of jobs and continual attacks on working conditions workers must pose an independent political strategy advancing a socialist program aimed at reorganizing the economy based on production for human need, not private profit.

We urge autoworkers to contact the *Autoworker Newsletter* about an international socialist strategy to advance the interests of the working class.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact