

Feds subpoena security camera footage and visitor logs in investigation of July fire at Detroit UAW headquarters

Jessica Goldstein
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On Wednesday it was revealed that the US Justice Department is carefully examining the circumstances surrounding a fire that appeared to have started on the third floor in the information technology department at the United Autoworkers (UAW) headquarters, known as Solidarity House, in Detroit, Michigan, on Saturday, July 13. The fire also damaged adjacent public relations office space in the sprawling headquarters, which was reported to have been mostly empty at the time.

Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Internal Revenue Service and the US Labor Department served a grand jury subpoena for security camera footage and visitor logs from Solidarity House just days after the fire broke out. The UAW complied with the subpoena and turned over the requested footage and logs for several days surrounding the date of the fire, according to the *Detroit News*.

The Detroit Fire Department is still investigating the cause of the fire, although Deputy Fire Commissioner Dave Fornell stated publicly in October that the department does not believe it to be arson, but related to an “equipment malfunction.” Fornell reported that the fire caused “a considerable amount of damage” to a storage unit on the third floor of the headquarters. Two firefighters were injured responding to the scene.

The fire started in the midst of an ongoing federal investigation into the UAW over allegations of widespread corruption. Just days following the fire the UAW staged its ceremonial hand-shaking with Big Three auto executives marking the official start of the 2019 contract negotiations.

Thus far the federal probe has revealed that members of the UAW Chrysler bargaining committee took bribes funneled to them by FCA executives through the joint

UAW-FCA Training Center in order to push through concessions contracts that cut jobs and benefits and maintained the two-tier wages system. Several high-ranking UAW officials, including UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell, received jail terms for taking illegal payouts.

As the probe widened, officials from FCA, General Motors, and other top officials were implicated and charged with misuse of union funds for personal use, racketeering, fraud and kickback schemes.

The details of the subpoena were revealed to the public just two weeks after US Attorney Matthew Schneider told the press that government oversight of the UAW was a “definite possibility” under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act given the depth of the corruption uncovered by the FBI probe, which has led to 11 convictions and charges filed against a total of 13 current and former UAW officials, including former international president Gary Jones.

In the same interview Schneider expressed his concern with the UAW’s lack of cooperation with federal corruption investigators and his lack of confidence in the reform efforts spearheaded by acting UAW President Rory Gamble.

Suspicion that the Solidarity House fire was deliberately set is heightened by incriminating statements made by former UAW President Gary Jones, who was forced out as a result of the scandal.

In the indictment of Jones associate, former Region 5 Director Vance Pearson, federal prosecutors cited a meeting between Jones, Pearson and Edward Robinson, another Region 5 official, that include direct quotes, likely taken from a hidden microphone. In the

conversation Jones, talking like a mafia don, told his subordinates to destroy incriminating evidence. He offered to give one of Robinson's family members a sham job if he would accept all blame for the criminal activity.

Wayne State law professor Peter Henning told the *Detroit News* that if the cause of the fire is determined to be arson and if evidence is found to have been destroyed as a result it carries with it the very serious charge of obstruction of justice.

Rank-and-file autoworkers should not place the slightest confidence in the US Justice Department and the administration of President Donald Trump to bring the UAW to justice for its crimes against workers. They would do well to recall the federal takeover of the Teamsters union under the Reagan administration. The corruption in the Teamsters union continued even after new leaders were installed from the union reform group, Teamsters for a Democratic Union. The new group of union sellouts continued to collaborate with management against the workers just as before, pushing through numerous concessions contracts, including the sellout of the 1997 United Parcel Service strike.

The new UAW administration headed by acting president Rory Gamble has continued its slavish collaboration with management by forcing through a concessions agreement at Fiat Chrysler, last of the Big Three Auto contracts to be negotiated in 2019. The contract was rammed through in the span of just a few days, without giving workers adequate time to review its terms. Workers demonstrated their lack of confidence in the UAW through mass abstention from voting, with as many as 50 percent not casting ballots in some plants.

The contracts at Ford, General Motors and Fiat Chrysler have cut wages and benefits for thousands of workers, instituted conditions of permanent temporary work with no job protection, and sanctioned the closure of plants across the US with the loss of thousands of jobs and the devastation entire communities.

The contracts negotiated at GM, Ford, and Fiat Chrysler drawn up by the criminals in the UAW leadership should be considered null and void. Rank-and-file workers must take up the struggle themselves to organize a fight back. This requires an organized fight by rank-and-file not only against the corporations, but their loyal class collaborators in the UAW and trade

unions worldwide.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworkers Newsletter* calls on workers at every auto plant in the US to form rank-and-file committees independent of the unions and pro-corporate Democratic and Republican parties. These rank-and-file committees will hold meetings to democratically discuss and decide upon their own demands which can include but not be limited to a guarantee that all temporary and part-time workers be made full-time with full pay and benefits, that all closed plants be reopened and all terminated workers rehired with no further plant closures and layoffs, and a 30 percent wage increase and free health care benefits for all workers.

The fight against the global auto corporations and union corruption is international in character. Autoworkers in Mexico, Canada, the US, India, China, Germany, France and countries all over the world must join hands with their brothers and sisters across all sections of the working class through the formation of rank-and-file committees to fight for an end to the capitalist system which breeds corruption at all levels of power and misery for the working class worldwide.



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