

New UAW Ford director part of union's narrow inner circle

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The UAW announced Thursday the appointment of Gerald Kariem, director of Region 1D, as Vice President for the Ford Department. The job was left open after the elevation of Rory Gamble, the previous VP for Ford, to the position of International president. Gamble took over as president on an interim basis after the forced resignation of Gary Jones, who has been implicated in the growing corruption scandal.

The appointment of Kariem elevates another member of the UAW's narrow inner circle into the union's top leadership. Kariem has a long resume in the UAW bureaucracy. Since landing a cushy appointment to the UAW international staff in 2001, under the administration of then UAW President Stephen Yokich, he has moved steadily up the union's ladder. He was appointed assistant Region 1D director in 2008 and later obtained the director's post. His mentor, Yokich, survived a US Labor Department investigation into corruption allegations from his time as the union's VP for General Motors.

As Region 1D director, Kariem hauled in \$175,480 in 2018 and can expect a sizeable pay boost with his new job. He serves on the Alliance for Health Board of directors, receiving an undisclosed stipend, and has served as an instructor and conference coordinator at the University of Michigan Labor Studies Institute.

Like other top UAW leaders, Kariem is deeply embedded in the Democratic Party establishment in Michigan, having served on the transition team for Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

Summing up his corporatist outlook, Kariem said in a statement following his appointment, "I look forward to working with our members as well as the Ford Corporation, which has demonstrated good corporate citizenship in the past." He continued, "We will also aggressively implement the new contract. Our members

will benefit from the pathways to full pay they created and the launch of new products and technologies. This is an exciting time for UAW-Ford members."

The appointment of Kariem to a top UAW post comes as the union is wracked by a corruption scandal that has implicated the union's last two presidents, Gary Jones and Dennis Williams, and led to the conviction of other top bureaucrats. Among those sent to prison have been former UAW Vice President for Fiat Chrysler Norwood Jewell, who negotiated the 2015 sellout contract with Fiat Chrysler, and Joe Ashton, former head of the UAW GM department and briefly a member of GM's board of directors.

A February 2018 report in *Automotive News* named Kariem as one of at least seven UAW officials who allowed state registrations for their charities to expire starting in 2016, following the first indictments of UAW officials. Other charities named in the report were run by UAW Vice President Cindy Estrada, retired Vice President for Ford Jimmy Settles, Dennis Williams, Rory Gamble, Joe Ashton and Norwood Jewell.

Also on the list was UAW executive administrative assistant Chuck Browning, who was president of a charity believed to be affiliated with former UAW President Bob King. No public tax filings for No Greater Calling, Kariem's charity, appear to be available and its website has been taken down.

Charities run by Jones, Settles, Estrada and Ashton have faced federal scrutiny for the possible misuse of donations. A charity run by the late UAW Vice President for Fiat Chrysler General Holiefield was used as a conduit for illegal payouts from the UAW-Chrysler joint training center as part of a scheme by management to obtain favorable contract terms, or in the words of one Fiat Chrysler executive, to keep UAW officials

“fat, dumb and happy.” Holiefield escaped prosecution only due to his death in 2015.

Speculation recently has mounted that the federal government may move to impose some form of trusteeship over the UAW. In recently filed court documents, federal prosecutors accused former UAW Region 5 Director Vance Pearson of embezzling money “in aid of a racketeering enterprise.” While Jones and Williams have not themselves been indicted, government sources have confirmed to multiple news outlets that they are the unnamed “UAW Official A” and “UAW Official B” referred to in court documents. The use of the term “racketeering” in relation to the UAW indicates that federal prosecutors may be targeting the entire organization, not just individual leaders.

According to recent reports, Gamble and Settles are also under investigation for accepting illegal kickbacks from vendors who make UAW-branded merchandise. Settles, who was in charge of 2015 contract negotiations with Ford, was instrumental in ramming through a sellout agreement that allowed a vast expansion in the use of temporary workers. Workers accused Settles of using intimidation to secure ratification of the deal, which narrowly passed amid allegations of vote rigging.

Meanwhile, the rotten character of the 2019 contracts, which were passed in the aftermath of the UAW’s betrayal of a 40-day national strike at GM, is becoming ever clearer. The GM deal sanctioned the closure of four GM facilities and provided a blank check to all three companies for the unrestricted use of temps. Bogus “pathways” to full employment for temps at Ford and GM, which require three consecutive years of service, will be unattainable for most, highlighted by the recent decision by General Motors to fire 240 temporary workers at its Fort Wayne, Indiana plant. The Fiat Chrysler contract does not even include such a fig leaf, allowing the company to maintain the cost advantages from its higher utilization of temps.

Meanwhile, hundreds of workers at the GM Detroit-Hamtramck plant will be forced to relocate or face layoff as the facility closes for an extended retooling. Under terms of the UAW-GM agreement, the plant, previously targeted for closure, will be re-opened as an electric truck facility. However, the number of jobs this will create is not yet known and it is not expected to

restart production for another 18 months.

Workers at a number of GM plants are on “emergency status” in the wake of the 40-day strike last fall. That means they are forced to work overtime, sometimes 12 hours a day, seven days a week, to make up shortages created during the strike. Those facilities under emergency status include the Flint Assembly Plant and a number of parts facilities.

The massive corruption that has been exposed in the leadership of the UAW reflects more than just the moral failings of individuals, but the transformed character of the organization itself, accomplished many decades ago. This is part of a universal process, in which the unions have been transformed into open agents of management with distinct socioeconomic interests opposed to the workers they claim to represent.

To organize a new struggle, and to mobilize the strength of the international working class, the World Socialist Web Site *Autoworker Newsletter* calls for the building of rank-and-file committees to take up the functions abandoned by the unions. These committees must link workers at different factories and join in common struggle with brother workers internationally.



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