

Ex-UAW regional director forced to resign amid harassment investigation

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United Auto Workers Region 2-B Director Richard Rankin was forced to resign his position Tuesday amid an investigation into accusations of sexual harassment brought against him by two female union officers, according to the *Detroit Free Press*.

In an official statement on its website, the UAW has portrayed Rankin's departure from the union as a "personal decision." Rankin was suspended from membership by the UAW International Executive Board on March 30 and faced a union trial under Article 30 of the UAW Constitution before he resigned. He was the only member of the board not to sign off on the charges brought against him by the International. His resignation effectively preempts any possibility of a union trial.

The International UAW brought its charges in March following an investigation into the allegations against Rankin. This was after the UAW had fired another Region 2-B member of its staff, former international representative Jason Barlow, for allegedly using his position to secure a job for his wife in the union.

Region 2-B encompasses the UAW's membership in Indiana and Ohio. It rakes in dues money from thousands of workers at General Motors' assembly plant in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Fiat Chrysler (FCA) workers at its transmission plant complex in Kokomo and Tipton, Indiana, and its Jeep plant in Toledo, Ohio, and workers in several other lower-wage occupations including health care, food service, and clerical.

Rankin was elevated to the regional director post in June 2017 after two decades of climbing the ladder of the UAW bureaucracy, starting at Local 1112 at General Motors' now shuttered Lordstown Assembly Plant in Ohio in 1997. As Region 2-B director, Rankin played a key role in shutting the plant, which forced the remaining 1,400 workers either to apply for transfer to

plants in other states or face unemployment.

The investigation into the harassment claims against Rankin began earlier this year and were first conducted solely by the UAW itself until it brought in the Washington, D.C.-based law firm Bredhoff & Kaiser. The investigation alleged that two nurses employed as UAW staff members of Local 2213 in Toledo, Ohio, had been repeatedly verbally sexually harassed by Rankin and that one instance escalated to a physical threat.

Rankin denied the claims in a statement issued by the law firm which represented him, Kalniz, Iorio & Reardon, stating that "I adamantly deny the baseless allegations of workplace harassment. I cooperated fully with the internal investigation conducted by the legal counsel hired the UAW. I have always supported the rights of workers to be free from workplace harassment."

Whatever the truth of the allegations against Rankin, rank-and-file workers in the factories that he presided over would laugh at the assertion that any UAW official "always supported the rights of workers to be free from workplace harassment."

A 2015 lawsuit brought by female workers at Ford's Chicago Assembly and Chicago Stamping plants alleged sexual harassment by Ford managers and UAW officials in the plants, although it was denied class action status in 2019. The lawsuit named UAW officials, including current UAW Local 551 Chairman Alan "Coby" Millender, as either directly taking part in or refusing to protect workers from sexual harassment.

In 2017 Ford had to settle separate claims filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission by female Chicago-area Ford workers who said they faced sexual and racial harassment from company supervisors and UAW officials.

Federal Judge Robert Dow, who denied class action status of the Ford workers' lawsuit, said he based his ruling on the bogus grounds that individual workers experienced different forms of harassment and that they could sue as individuals. The decision effectively let Ford and the UAW off the hook. For its part, the UAW never expressed any interest in investigating these claims, in contrast to the allegations leveled against Rankin.

Currently, workers at auto plants across North America are being forced to continue working under unsafe conditions as the COVID-19 pandemic surges. The UAW has played a key role in enforcing the deadly return to work by suppressing opposition. The result has been hundreds of autoworkers becoming infected with COVID-19 while the UAW and the auto companies cover up the real situation in the plants.

Rankin's resignation takes place against a backdrop of deep turmoil inside the UAW, as devastating allegations of corruption were outlined in a lawsuit brought by General Motors against Fiat Chrysler earlier this week. The lawsuit alleges that FCA executives funneled tens of millions of dollars through offshore bank accounts to top UAW officials as bribes, and that the UAW acted as direct agents of FCA management in a scheme to force a merger with GM. Following the jailing of top UAW leaders for taking bribes and kickbacks, the latest exposures by GM reveal the UAW as a criminal syndicate utterly hostile to the working class.

It is significant that Rankin's resignation has received greater attention in the local and national media than the explosive allegations of massive corruption contained in the GM documents. This likely reflects fear of the devastating impact of the GM exposures on the already tattered credibility of the UAW, further undermining its ability to suppress workers' opposition.

Whatever the motives of the UAW in moving against Rankin, the case is another exposure of criminal conduct by the union bureaucracy.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has consistently warned that the UAW is a pro-corporate organization, fundamentally opposed to the interests of the working class. Following endless concessions contracts and continuing revelations of its criminality, workers are drawing the conclusion that they must wage a struggle

independently and against the UAW. Workers at auto plants across the Midwestern US have taken matters into their own hands by forming rank-and-file safety committees to fight for the right to a safe workplace. Workers interested in learning more should contact the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*.



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