

Ford Louisville Assembly Plant UAW building chairman lashes out at workers for being “ungrateful”

Jessica Goldstein
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Herb Hibbs, the building chairman for United Auto Workers Local 862 at Ford’s Louisville Assembly Plant (LAP) in Kentucky, lashed out in the tone of a cornered rat against “ungrateful” autoworkers in a letter sent last Thursday.

LAP is one of several auto assembly plants throughout the United States which are being idled due to a worldwide shortage of semiconductors used in brakes control modules. Workers had been complaining to the UAW—to whom they pay dues to “represent” them—because they were not getting their unemployment insurance claims resolved during the shutdown.

“Does anyone understand that it is NOT THE UNIONS JOB to handle your unemployment,” Hibbs howled. “We are just willing to help, by going above and beyond our duties. We are all working and doing what we can with the resources we currently have. It is a trying time for everyone, BUT to blame the union because the UI screwed up your UI [Unemployment Insurance] is RIDICULOUS.

“Ford is not responsible either, this time. Have you watched the news over the past year? No state is immune from Unemployment screw ups, money, W2s, etc. Kentucky is in the top 5 worst handled, and inadequate systems.

“We have called the Governor’s Office. ... We have emailed [Kentucky Unemployment Issues]. We have called the Mayor’s office. ... Ford has been in contact with Unemployment since Sunday. The Union has been given the exact same info as you.

“Do you think we like all this crap, and have nothing better to do?? There is no conspiracy theory or anyone trying to cheat anyone out of benefits. Ford isn’t going

to pay 100% [supplemental unemployment benefits] when they pay their unemployment taxes just for this purpose.

“How about a Thank you? Keep up the Good Work? We appreciate everything you guys are doing to help us? Glad we have you because other people don’t have this kind of help? Is that too much to ask?”

What exactly do workers have to be “thankful for” when it comes to the UAW? If one were to sum up their role over the course of the coronavirus pandemic, it is that they have assisted the auto companies in allowing workers to become infected and die of COVID-19.

The UAW, working hand in hand with Ford and the other major US-based auto corporations, has kept workers on the job in unsafe plants while COVID-19 has run rampant since last May. Hundreds of US autoworkers have been infected and countless died due to these policies, placing profits above workers’ lives, which have been carried out dutifully by the union.

The true number of cases and deaths at each plant has been covered up by the UAW and the companies. Each day workers walk into the plants, most do not know who among their coworkers has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or exposed to it, until they hear from other coworkers by word of mouth or social media.

Workers know that their safety concerns about working in the plants under these conditions are brushed aside by the UAW on a daily basis. Workers are left to themselves to make sure that they have proper personal protective equipment, enough cleaning supplies for their work areas, and to try as best they can to maintain social distancing in plants where it is nearly impossible because they are operating full shifts.

The UAW does not even abide by its own inadequate

safety protocols that it helped to orchestrate with the corporations in order to reopen the plants to ensure the flow of profits into the banks and stock markets. It certainly does not shut the lines down for thorough cleaning nor send workers home after positive COVID-19 cases are reported. The union's job is not to protect the health and safety of workers, but to protect the profit interests of the corporate oligarchs, no matter the cost of life or limb.

It is significant that much of the auto industry is now being shut down for the first time since May, not due to unsafe conditions which have persisted and worsened since reopening, but due to the fact that a lack of parts makes production impossible. However, the fact that the industry was shut down for two months between last March and May was only brought about by wildcat job actions, taken by workers themselves independent of and in opposition to the UAW.

Hibbs' letter spells out in plain English the UAW's own class hatred of the autoworkers which they falsely claim to represent. For the union, demands from autoworkers that they represent them is a distraction from their privileged lifestyle of steak dinners, golf junkets and fine cigars, financed by the auto companies and by embezzling union dues. The letter is further demonstration that the UAW is not a workers organization, but a paid agent of management.

Moreover, the desperate, pathetic tone of the rant reflects the extreme level of nervousness which the trade union bureaucracy views the growing opposition of the working class around the world, including the struggle by teachers in Chicago and cities throughout the United States. Throughout the country and even the world, there is growing support for a general strike to force a shutdown of schools and nonessential industries, with full compensation for workers during the shutdown.

The unions, increasingly isolated and discredited among workers, fear that they will not be able to force through the demands of their paymasters in Wall Street without provoking a social explosion.

Hibbs' point of view echoes that of billionaire pandemic profiteer Michael Bloomberg. Workers are "ungrateful" for demanding what they need in order to live after sacrificing their lives for the profit interests of Wall Street during the pandemic—they should quit complaining and get back to work.

His letter demonstrates that the way forward for workers in the fight against "herd immunity" is through asserting their own independent initiative, in opposition to the corrupt trade unions. The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworkers Newsletter* is helping workers to establish new organizations, rank-and-file committees, to resist the betrayals of the union bureaucracy, lay the framework for a united struggle of all sections of the working class, including teachers, autoworkers, UPS workers and others, and prepare the road for a general political strike to shut down nonessential industry.

To join a committee at your plant or for assistance forming one, contact us today.



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