

United Auto Workers executives received massive payout in 2020 as COVID-19 ravaged auto plants

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The latest US Department of Labor report for 2020 filed by the United Auto Workers shows that it increased both its income and assets even as its membership declined amid the global coronavirus pandemic.

In its annual LM-2 filed for the calendar year 2020, the UAW showed net assets of \$1,026,568,450, that is, more than \$1 billion—up more than \$31 million from 2019. The income of the 14 top executives at UAW national headquarters totaled more than \$3 million. Meanwhile, UAW membership declined slightly to 397,073, from 399,839 in 2019.

As executives celebrate with their lavish incomes, the UAW is currently isolating a strike by 3,000 graduate students at Columbia University in New York City who are members of the union. They are forced to subsist on \$275 a week in strike pay in one of the most expensive cities in America.

Remarking on the report, UAW President Rory Gamble said, “The UAW managed a very difficult pandemic year reporting steady membership numbers and weathering pandemic shutdowns.”

Indeed, the UAW bureaucracy has not only weathered the pandemic but is doing better than ever. Among the expenses listed on the report are \$978,857 for the UAW 2020 national Community Action Program conference at the Marriot in Washington D.C. Also listed is \$35,531 for rooms and catering at Motor City Casino in Detroit and \$27,997 for a conference at Sinatra Beach Resort in St. Petersburg, Florida, located hundreds of miles away from the nearest assembly plant.

A central focus of the years-long corruption probe by federal investigators was the use of millions of dollars by union officials to finance lavish getaways to Palm Springs, California. The previous two UAW presidents, Dennis Williams and Gary Jones, pleaded guilty to

charges stemming from the scheme and went to prison, and Gamble, their successor, claimed that his top priority was to “clean up” the UAW.

But the UAW’s own public finances show that, during a year in which dozens of autoworkers died from the virus, even as the UAW and the federal government were negotiating a wrist-slap deal to avoid a federal takeover, the gravy train was continuing unabated for UAW officials.

As has been repeatedly noted by the *World Socialist Web Site*, the UAW has completely divorced its income and finances from any struggle to improve or even maintain the working conditions and living standards of the workers it claims to represent. While collecting \$288 million in 2020 in revenues, including \$72 million in interest payments on its investments, the UAW disbursed just \$6 million in strike payments, out of a strike fund that stands at \$790 million.

The strike fund is now \$30 million greater than before a 40-day strike against General Motors in 2019. GM workers were starved on the picket line by the union, which began paying out a meager \$250 per week 15 days into the strike.

Meanwhile, UAW international officers are enjoying the benefits of the 30 percent pay increases they awarded themselves at the Constitutional Convention in 2018.

UAW President Rory Gamble topped the list at \$244,772 in salary and expenses. Number two on the list is Ray Curry, international secretary-treasurer, at \$236,608. Altogether 17 top UAW officers grossed more than \$200,000 last year. Others of note include Terry Dittes, vice president for GM (\$231,614); Cindy Estrada, vice president for Stellantis/Fiat Chrysler (\$220,506); and Gerald Kariem, vice president for Ford (\$221,893).

Over 110 other international officers took in salaries and

expenses in excess of \$150,000 each.

Justin and Derek Jewell, the sons of convicted former UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell, earned \$140,000 each in annual salary in 2020 as “servicing reps.”

But the income and assets listed on the official Labor Department filing are only a fraction of the assets and income of the UAW. In addition to direct corporate bribes, UAW officials receive millions in personal compensation that they do not have to publicly disclose through their participation in joint labor-management initiatives and the UAW’s control of the multi-billion-dollar retiree healthcare fund.

As a result of the federal corruption investigation, the UAW and the auto companies agreed to close the various joint program centers, such as the UAW-GM Center for Human Resources, and lay off staff members. Despite this, the 2020 LM-2 indicates the UAW got \$2.3 million from the GM training center, \$3.6 million from Fiat Chrysler (now Stellantis) and \$5.9 million from Ford, excluding salaries and expenses of UAW employees.

Beginning in the 1980s, when the UAW officially adopted the program of corporatism, the union has embraced unlimited union-management collaboration against the interests of workers in the name of global “competitiveness.” Past gains won through decades of struggle have been shredded and hundreds of thousands of jobs eliminated. The UAW has become an appendage of corporate management, which has funneled billions into the coffers of its union “partners.”

This same process has occurred in unions throughout the world, from IG Metall in Germany to the Trade Union Congress in Britain and the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). This demonstrates that the degeneration of the unions results from their common feature, their nationalist and pro-capitalist program and orientation.

Thomas Adams, a retired GM Buick City autoworker who has studied UAW finances in depth, told the *World Socialist World Site Autoworker Newsletter*, “I know the money is still flowing; there is more to it. They have sold their \$30 million [UAW-GM] training center and eliminated 60-100 jobs.” Three former UAW officials who sat on the CHR board of directors, including former Vice President Joe Ashton, have been convicted on corruption charges.

He continued, “But that’s not the whole thing. They have this bureaucratic apparatus they have put together in the union. According to the contract, GM is supposed to provide them office space. The foothold the companies have in the union bureaucracy isn’t any less than it was

two years ago.”

The UAW is not a workers’ organization. It is an investment vehicle for the executives who control it. According to the 2020 LM-2, the UAW held investments of \$725,929,116, including marketable securities and other financial investments.

The increase in the UAW’s assets and income has taken place during a year in which autoworkers have been subject to unprecedented threats to the lives of themselves, family and friends through exposure to the coronavirus in the auto plants. Untold thousands of workers have contracted the virus in crowded and under-ventilated workplaces, and scores have died.

But a real accounting of the toll is impossible because management and the UAW have concealed the actual numbers from autoworkers out of fear of sparking a rebellion.

A temporary suspension of plant operations began last March only after autoworkers stopped production in defiance of the UAW and management. Since the return to work in May, the UAW has not sanctioned a single job action in the auto industry despite the flagrant disregard by management of even the inadequate screening, cleaning and social distancing protocols it agreed to implement.

Adams explained, “They eliminated 1 million jobs, and the UAW leadership was complicit. What does this mean for someone on the shop floor? I’ll tell you. It means you have people out there in those plants right now working seven days a week, 12 hours a day. They don’t have any relief whatsoever. There are seven different layers of employment status from full time to I don’t know what. These are all things the UAW agreed to.”

The financial filings add urgency to the building of the network of rank-and-file committees, formed last year shortly after the reopening of the auto industry, in plants and workplaces throughout the country. These committees, composed of and controlled by workers themselves, are the antipode to the corporatist arm of management that goes by the name of a “union.” *To join the rank-and-file safety committee in your plant, or for help building one, contact the World Socialist Web Site using the form at wsws.org/workers.*



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