

Another UAW executive charged with stealing dues money, as union announces “re-vote” on defeated Deere contract

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Late Friday night, the United Auto Workers announced that it was having John Deere workers re-vote on the same agreement just rejected by 10,000 striking workers, with “modest modifications.” The announcement is a desperate effort to ram through a concessions contract that has been defeated twice by workers.

The latest rotten maneuver takes place as the corruption scandal engulfing the UAW is expanding.

The indictment this week of Timothy Edmunds, secretary-treasurer of United Auto Workers Local 412, brings to 16 the number of UAW and corporate officials prosecuted since 2017 in the ongoing federal investigation.

Edmunds has been charged with the theft of \$2 million in members’ dues money. He allegedly used a union credit card to fund his gambling habit, as well as the purchase of cars, guns and child support payments. Prosecutors said he was a regular at the Detroit Greektown Casino, putting more than \$16 million in play—betting over \$10,000 a day—between 2016 and 2020.

All of this supposedly escaped the notice of UAW financial officers, including current UAW President Ray Curry, who served as international secretary-treasurer between 2017 and 2021.

In a report released November 11, Neil Barofsky, the federal monitor overseeing the UAW, revealed that Curry himself had been investigated for taking college football playoff championship tickets worth \$2,000 from a vendor, despite UAW rules barring the acceptance of such gifts. If this is all Curry has been investigated for, it is only because the federal oversight of the UAW is aimed at trying to salvage the credibility

of the organization.

Two former UAW presidents, Dennis Williams and Gary Jones, were convicted and sent to prison for embezzlement of union funds. Curry’s predecessor, Rory Gamble, had also been suspected of taking kickbacks or bribes, but he was not indicted. Investigations are pending against no less than 15 other UAW officials.

Despite the government’s settlement with the union and the appointment of an independent monitor earlier this year, the UAW remains a cesspool of corruption. Every additional indictment, conviction and exposure only confirms what workers already know, that the UAW is organized and run by an apparatus that benefits from workers’ exploitation, takes bribes from the companies and exists for the sole purpose of suppressing the class struggle.

The “re-vote” at Deere is only its latest attempt by the UAW to force through an agreement opposed by workers. The UAW carried out a similar operation in the spring and summer. Nearly 3,000 workers at Volvo Trucks struck for several weeks and voted down three UAW sellout agreements, before the UAW claimed that a re-vote on the third contract passed by 17 votes.

At Dana, an auto parts maker and Deere supplier, workers almost unanimously rejected a deal pushed by the UAW and the United Steelworkers union earlier this fall. The UAW and USW responded by keeping workers on the job under day-to-day contract extensions for weeks before ramming through a largely similar deal using lies and intimidation.

Workers’ anger has been further fueled by the reality that in the midst of a deadly pandemic they have been forced by management and the UAW into unsafe

factories to carry out nonessential production. Meanwhile, top UAW officials have remained safely at home drawing their six-figure salaries during the entire health disaster.

A faction of the ruling class led by the Biden administration sees the unions as critical instruments for defending big business and suppressing the class struggle. The ruling class is well aware and fearful of growing support for rank-and-file committees in auto plants established with the help of the *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Party, including at Volvo Trucks, Dana and Deere.

The Democrats have the support of organizations such as the Democratic Socialists of America, *Labor Notes* and Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD), which are dedicated to promoting the stranglehold of the UAW and other corporatist unions over the working class. These groups are promoting the illusion that the UAW can be reformed by means of a government-mandated referendum.

Although the present system of electing officers by means of delegates hand-chosen by the union apparatus is undemocratic, the campaign promoting the direct elections is little more than an attempt to put lipstick on the giant, corrupt pig that is the UAW.

The top-to-bottom corruption that has been exposed in the UAW is not an individual, but a social phenomenon, which cannot be eliminated by the replacement of some corrupt officers. It flows more fundamentally from the transformation decades ago of the unions into corporatist appendages of management.

While the trade union bureaucracies were hardly strangers to graft and underhanded dealings for much of their existence in the 20th century, union corruption assumed a systemic and pathological character beginning in the 1980s. Based on their pro-capitalist and nationalist program, the unions universally responded to the globalization of production by lining up with “their” corporate bosses against overseas competition.

UAW membership has collapsed by 1 million since the early 1980s, and workers have suffered an endless series of concession contracts, the closure of factories, the decimation of communities and the destruction of working conditions. UAW finances, however, were largely unaffected. The union’s assets remain at about the \$1 billion level, funding a staff of hundreds of

functionaries who draw salaries well in excess of \$100,000 annually.

During 2020, the first year of the pandemic, UAW net assets rose to \$1.026 billion, up from \$994 million in 2019, with revenues topping \$228 million. Curry, then still UAW secretary-treasurer, pulled in \$236,000 in officially reported salary and expenses. The UAW paid out a total of \$90.3 million on “representational activities,” salaries of officers and staff.

The idea that such a diseased institution can be “reformed” is false. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party are fighting for development of independent rank-and-file factory and workplace committees as the genuine voice of workers. These committees are striving to link up workers across industries and national boundaries in defense of jobs, living standards and working conditions.

The building of new organizations of working class struggle must be combined with the development of a mass movement to put an end to the pandemic, mounting economic insecurity and the prospect of war, fighting for the reorganization of social and economic life on a socialist basis to meet human need, not private profit.



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