

# UAW President Ray Curry sits on board of directors of Mercedes-Benz, parent company of Detroit Diesel

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*UAW Local 163 is censoring Detroit Diesel workers by shutting off commenting on its Facebook page. The World Socialist Web Site wants to provide Detroit Diesel workers with a voice. Tell us what you think about the contract and what you think must be done to win your demands. All submissions will be kept anonymous.*

United Auto Workers President Ray Curry is a member of the Board of Supervisors of German automaker Mercedes-Benz, having held the position since 2018. According to wallmine.com, Curry's salary from the Mercedes board is \$150,600. This is in addition to his annual salary of \$272,000 which he receives from the UAW.

Mercedes-Benz AG, formerly known as Daimler AG, is the parent company of Detroit Diesel, a Michigan engine producer where the UAW is currently working overtime to block a strike. Last month, 1,300 workers at the plant voted by 98 percent to authorize strike action, and last week they voted down a UAW-backed sellout agreement with the company by 79 percent. The deal, which contained only an 8 percent cumulative wage increase over six years, would have resulted in a substantial cut to workers' real wages due to inflation, currently at 8.3 percent. The deal also would have maintained the two-tier wage structure, cut benefits and shortened the absurd nine-year wage progression by only three years.

The revelation of Curry's position on the company board only underscores the need for Detroit Diesel workers to take control of the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracy. The UAW is joined at the hip with the companies and seeks through bogus "bargaining" to jointly exploit the workers that it

claims to represent. What is presented as "negotiations" is in reality a corporate conspiracy against the workforce in which management, through the UAW, controls both sides of the bargaining table.

Curry's position on the board is not so much a "conflict of interest" but further proof that the UAW is entirely on the side of management. The last thing Curry and the UAW want is a powerful strike that would undermine the profits of their corporate paymasters.

Detroit Diesel workers should move to form a rank-and-file committee to demand that the UAW set an immediate strike date, enforce rank-and-file control over talks, provide for democratic discussion free of union censorship in which workers can formulate their own demands and appeal for the broadest possible support from autoworkers across Detroit and the auto industry, who are being left in the dark about Detroit Diesel by the UAW. In particular, the committee should appeal for support from striking agricultural equipment workers at CNH, whose strike is being isolated by the UAW.

Workers are in a powerful position because they produce engines critical for trucks and military vehicles. But the UAW is trying to systematically sabotage their position. In provocative comments to a local meeting before the vote, Local 163 President Mark "Gibby" Gibson declared that the union would not call a strike even if workers voted the deal down and that any subsequent deal would contain virtually identical economics to the first.

In the aftermath of the vote, the UAW, following a well-worn playbook developed last year at Volvo Trucks, Dana and John Deere, is subjecting workers to

complete radio silence on what it intends to do. It is also censoring workers by disabling comments on the local Facebook page, which had served as a venue for workers to voice their anger at the deal and call on their co-workers to reject it. With talks officially restarted today, this serves as a clear indication that the UAW intends to try to ram through a second deal virtually identical to the first.

At the time of his appointment to the board, Curry was head of the union's heavy trucks division. In that capacity Curry was the chief architect of the sellout of a strike at Volvo Trucks last spring. Workers forced the strike through a rank-and-file rebellion, which included the formation of a rank-and-file committee, following the rejection of numerous sellout deals. Shortly after shutting down the monthlong strike, Curry was made president of the union, succeeding Rory Gamble.

According to an article on the website of the University of Alabama's Culverhouse College of Business, where Curry received an MBA in 2013, Curry was elected to the Daimler/Mercedes-Benz board at the company's 2018 annual shareholders meeting as a representative of the trade unions outside of Germany, where the transnational auto giant is headquartered. "I am excited about this opportunity and feel so blessed," Curry was quoted as saying.

Under Germany's "co-determination" labor law, company boards are required to consist of a mix of shareholder and union representatives. Through this and the creation of workers councils and other joint labor-management schemes, German law enshrines and makes mandatory the incestuous and corrupt relationship between management and the unions, which has long been the norm in the United States.

One of the most notorious figures to come out of this system is Bernd Osterloh, a former top official at the IG Metall auto union in Germany. Osterloh drew an income of 750,000 euros (\$785,000) a year from his position as head of the joint works council at Volkswagen. He later left his position to become head of Human Resources at Volkswagen's truck and bus subsidiary.

The University of Alabama article adds: "As a member of the Supervisory Board, Curry will aid in the monitoring of executive management, appointments to the Board of Management, and the approval of the Operative Planning Board." In other words, Curry is

jointly responsible for overseeing the extraction of profits from the company's global workforce and maximizing value for wealthy shareholders.

This is far from the first time that a UAW official has sat on a corporate board. The first instance was in 1979, when UAW President Douglas Fraser joined the Chrysler board at the invitation of CEO Lee Iacocca. In the following years, the UAW collaborated with Chrysler management in closing dozens of plants, destroying tens of thousands of jobs and cutting wages by tens of thousands of dollars per year in today's dollars.

In 2009, the UAW was given a spot on the General Motors board of directors as part of the restructuring deal brokered by the Obama administration. In exchange for the board spot and billions of dollars in stock from both Chrysler and GM, the UAW signed off on massive cuts, including the expansion of the hated two-tier wage structure and the slashing of wages of new hires by half. Joe Ashton, the last UAW-appointed board member at GM, later was convicted on federal corruption charges.

The social and financial interests of the UAW have been integrated with the companies through countless other means, including its control of VEBA (Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association) and other investment vehicles, direct payments through joint "training centers" and other programs and direct bribes.

A recent corruption probe by federal investigators brought down more than a dozen top UAW officials, including former presidents Dennis Williams and Gary Jones. In addition to embezzling millions of dollars in union dues for expensive dinners and vacations, top officials were also charged with accepting bribes from executives at Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (now Stellantis) during contract negotiations, in order, in the words of one executive, to keep them "fat, dumb and happy."



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