

Who is Chuck Browning, the UAW's head “negotiator” in the CNH strike?

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27 May 2022

The top union negotiator in the ongoing strike by 1,200 CNH workers, United Auto Workers (UAW) Vice President Chuck Browning, is a prominent member of the inner circle controlling the corruption-wracked auto union.

Striking CNH farm and heavy equipment workers would do well to study carefully the record of Browning, a close associate of top UAW officials convicted for bribery and embezzlement and a veteran of countless contract betrayals.

Browning is both vice president of the UAW in charge of the Ford department as well as heading the union's agricultural implements division. In the latter role, he oversaw the contract talks at farm and heavy equipment maker John Deere last fall.

Under Browning, the UAW attempted to push through a series of regressive contracts at Deere that were resoundingly rebuffed by workers. The initial contract negotiated by Browning called for paltry wage increases averaging just 2 percent a year over the life of a six-year agreement, under conditions of accelerating inflation, now standing at 8.5 percent annually. The contract completely ignored workers' demands for the restoration of decades of concessions, including retiree health benefits and the elimination of tiers.

While Browning brazenly and falsely claimed the contract contained “substantial hard fought gains,” Deere workers responded with a massive 90 percent rejection vote, forcing the UAW to call a strike. However, once the strike began Browning and the UAW did everything possible to isolate and betray it.

Deere workers were presented with a second contract that failed to restore lost concessions, leaving workers behind economically from where they were in 1997. After workers rejected that contract, Browning oversaw a campaign of lies and intimidation to force a revote on essentially the same contract, with local UAW officials openly threatening to retaliate against workers advocating against the deal and for a continuation of the strike. The effort to shut down the strike came just as Deere workers were gaining substantial support across the US and internationally.

The UAW served as a mouthpiece of management propaganda and did nothing to counter company threats that it would hire replacement workers, insisting instead that it was the best contract workers could get. Ultimately Browning got

the contract through, despite widespread anger and opposition among rank-and-file workers.

For these “services” Browning officially took in a combined salary and expenses of \$208,924 in 2021, according to the latest federal filing by the UAW—more than five times the income of a new CNH worker making \$19 an hour.

Now Browning is reprising the same role he played at Deere, isolating CNH workers on the picket line and keeping the UAW's membership in the dark about the strike. This can only be part of the preparations to force through a sellout that meets none of workers' basic demands.

None of this should come as any surprise. Throughout his career Browning has served as a hand-raiser for a massively corrupt UAW bureaucracy that has overseen a devastating decline in the living standards of autoworkers and the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Browning's rise was part of an insulated process that excluded any genuine input from rank-and-file workers. In this circle advancement is not conditioned on winning improvements for workers: far from it. “Success” is based on winning the favor of fellow highly paid union officials who in turn are lavishly rewarded by the auto companies through a network of official corruption, including “training centers,” joint committees and similar scams.

Browning started his career in 1987 working at the former Mazda plant in Flat Rock, Michigan, now Ford Flat Rock Assembly. He quickly moved up the ladder in the union bureaucracy, holding several UAW posts, including plant chairman.

In 2000 UAW President Stephen Yokich appointed Browning to the international staff, where he worked as an assistant in the Ford department. In this capacity he helped the UAW push through concessionary contracts at Ford that implemented tiered wages for the first time and undermined retiree health care benefits.

From 2010 to 2014 Browning served as an administrative assistant to UAW International President Bob King. While Bob King has so far escaped indictment during the UAW corruption scandal, corruption ran rampant under his administration. Most notoriously, the late UAW Vice President for Fiat Chrysler General Holiefield was accused of pocketing hundreds of

thousands in illegal payouts, bribes from Fiat Chrysler in exchange for favorable contract terms (CNH was a subsidiary of Fiat Chrysler for much of this period). Holiefield's wife, Monica Morgan, was indicated for collusion in the scheme, which involved funneling money through phony charities they had set up.

Bob King and Chuck Browning set up their own dubious charity during this time, called Keeping the Dream Alive. According to federal tax filings the charity collected \$500,630 between 2013 and 2017, when it was made inactive along with other charities run by top UAW officials as scrutiny from federal investigators intensified. Public records do not indicate what organizations, if any, received donations from Keeping the Dream Alive.

During the corruption probe the private charities of UAW officials became the subject of interest by federal investigators, including charities run by UAW Vice President Cindy Estrada, Vice President for GM Joe Ashton, former UAW President Gary Jones and former UAW Vice President for Ford Jimmy Settles. Ashton and Jones were convicted and sentenced to prison terms.

After the retirement of Bob King in 2014 Browning became the top aide to UAW President Dennis Williams, receiving approximately \$150,000 a year for the position of "executive administrative assistant." In 2015 Williams helped ram through a corruption-tainted sellout agreement at the Big Three automakers that opened the floodgates to temporary and part-time workers. It later emerged that Norwood Jewell, then vice president in charge of Fiat Chrysler, the successor to Holiefield, took bribes along with other UAW officials in a scheme to obtain management-friendly contract terms.

During his tenure Williams and other UAW officials concealed hundreds of thousands of dollars in improper expenditures, including extended vacations at private villas, golf outings, lavish meals and other expensive perks, billed to the UAW for "union business." As the top aide to Williams at this time Browning would, or should, have been aware of these corrupt activities. Browning has not been charged with any official wrongdoing, but federal officials stated as recently as late 2021 that there are investigations which remain open.

Browning's close association with this vipers' nest of corruption did not prove an obstacle to his further rise. On the contrary, it assured it.

In June 2018 the UAW Constitutional Convention anointed Browning director of UAW Region 1A as part of a game of executive musical chairs within tight-knit UAW upper echelons. The same convention elected the soon-to-be indicted Gary Jones as UAW president.

In June 2021 Browning was named head of the UAW's Ford department to replace the retiring Gerald Kariem, who had only stepped into the position in 2020 to fill the vacancy left when the previous vice president for Ford, Rory Gamble, was made acting UAW president to replace the indicted Gary Jones.

Since 2000, Browning has received more than \$3 million in income from his various positions moving up the ranks of the UAW's headquarters, which, it must be said, represents only what was officially reported to the government.

Another cushy post nabbed by Browning was the vice presidency of the UAW Retiree Medical Benefits Trust (also known as the VEBA). This multi-billion dollar investment vehicle was set up by the UAW by colluding with the auto companies to offload their retiree health care benefit obligations at a significant discount to the UAW. While the trust fund has imposed cuts on retirees, it has provided well-paid jobs to UAW officials and their cronies.

The massive corruption within the UAW leadership is a symptom of a deeper process. Over the past four decades the UAW, along with unions all over the world, have abandoned their earlier functions as defensive organs of the working class. They have instead become integrated into the structures of corporate management and in many respects a business unto themselves, with interests distinct from and opposed to the workers they claim to represent.

In the UAW this has taken the form of the abandonment of even basic working class solidarity. The principles of "no contract, no-work" and "an injury to one is an injury to all" are long forgotten. The union has abandoned the 40-hour workweek and instead forces workers into 10- to 12-hour days, six or even seven days a week. It sanctions multi-tier wages, pits young workers against older, part-time against full-time, and in general promotes every division imaginable.

A complete rebellion against this pro-corporate institution is necessary. The *World Socialist Web Site Auto Workers Newsletter* is assisting workers in building rank-and-file committees in their workplaces independent of the UAW, to provide a voice to workers. These committees are working to break down barriers and unite workers within and between the plants, throughout different companies and industries and even across national boundaries, while providing a means for workers to articulate their genuine interests.

To find out more about joining the CNH Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email cnhrfc@gmail.com, or text (262) 676-2381.



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