Former UAW bureaucrat Terry Dittes attacks “outside influences” in UAW election

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Last week, retired United Auto Workers Vice President Terry Dittes issued a statement attacking “outside influences” in the UAW presidential campaign and endorsing incumbent Ray Curry. Although Dittes did not indicate whom he was referring to, it was clearly aimed at the campaign of Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president who is opposing Curry. Lehman’s campaign has been endorsed by the *World Socialist Web Site*.

“As we approach the elections of the UAW International Executive Board, many outside influences are attempting to weaken our union and hurt our active and retired members,” Dittes wrote. “We have the opportunity to stop the anti-union groups of people … We, as active and retired members of the UAW, will show outside anti-union groups, self-interested candidates, and also employers across the nation that UAW members stand strong and UNITED in Solidarity with our leadership!”

First, Dittes’ comments encapsulate the outlook of the entire UAW apparatus and its contempt for rank-and-file UAW members. To demand that workers blindly “unite behind their leadership” is the language of a dictatorship not a democratic organization.

Second, Dittes must think workers are fools. While he attacks Lehman and by extension the WSWS as “outsiders,” Dittes, Curry & Co. are the real outsiders, joined at the hip with management. Both are career bureaucrats who climbed to the top of an UAW apparatus, which has spent decades accepting bribes from the auto bosses and other corporate and governmental “influences.”

UAW executives hold positions on various corporate boards, seats on the multi-billion UAW retirement fund, joint “training” schemes and other business ventures. These have all been the source of “legal” and illegal bribes to the UAW to sign pro-company deals, which have robbed workers of their jobs, livelihoods and workplace rights.

To these bureaucrats the “union” is not the workers who they betray every day of the week. Instead it is a guarantee of their six-digit salaries, cozy positions, expense accounts and other perks. Before retiring on a UAW International Executive Board pension, Dittes pocketed $238,144 in 2021, not counting other sources of income. This is more than eight times the wage of a second-tier or temporary worker at GM.

What did Dittes do to “earn” his salary and golden parachute? In 2019, he oversaw the sellout of the 40-day strike by 48,000 GM workers. The agreement paved the way for a vast expansion of low-paid temporary workers, an increase in out-of-pocket costs and the shutdown of the Lordstown, Ohio assembly plant and other factories.

While the *World Socialist Web Site* campaigned for the expansion of the strike to Ford and Fiat Chrysler (now Stellantis), as well for international unity with GM workers in Mexico and around the world, Dittes and the UAW deliberately limited the strike to General Motors and rammed through a sellout that met none of workers’ demands. As one young autoworker from Flint put it to Lehman during a campaign last week, “We went out on strike in 2019 to stop the increase in health care costs, but it has only gotten worse since ... The only ones who say things got better after the strike are the guys who were stealing the money.”

Upon his retirement, the head of GM Labor Relations praised Dittes for his “leadership” and stressed that he “has always placed a high importance on joint activities” with the company.

Even though the total active membership of the UAW has declined to less than 400,000, the UAW’s assets

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have ballooned to roughly $1.2 billion, much of which is invested in the stock market, giving the UAW bureaucracy a direct financial stake in exploiting autoworkers. At the same time, Curry's delegates at the UAW convention voted to rescind an increase in strike pay.

UAW candidate for president Lehman has repeatedly said there are "two layers in the UAW: the workers who work and pay the dues, and the UAW bureaucrats who serve the corporations." He has called for the abolition of the UAW apparatus, the transfer of power to workers on the shopfloor, and the building of a network of rank-and-file factory committees to unite workers across industries and countries to fight for what they need.

Dittes and his boss know that they are hated by rank-and-file workers and they see the powerful support Lehman is gaining. The UAW apparatus did everything it could to prevent his nomination at the UAW convention, and is now resorting to the same old rhetoric about "outside agitators" it has always used against opponents.

The bureaucracy's denunciations of Lehman are taken word-for-word from the propaganda used by Henry Ford and other auto bosses in the 1930s to justify their violent assaults on the socialists and left-wing militants who led the campaign to found the UAW. Ford's anti-Semitic and racist *Dearborn Independent* regularly railed against the "Bolshevik" and "red" UAW organizers.

Curry speaks not only for the UAW apparatus of privileged bureaucrats, but also the Biden administration and the faction of the ruling class it represents. On the last day of the UAW convention Biden wrote Curry a letter praising the UAW for keeping the factories open while autoworkers were killed and sickened by COVID. "I can imagine no better partner to have by my side than the UAW," Biden wrote.

This is not the first time UAW bureaucrats have leveled charges of "outside" agitators against the WSWS. In October 2015, then UAW President Dennis Williams posted a statement on the UAW International Facebook page warning about about "outside groups" that "like to stir people up." The statement followed the two-to-one defeat of a UAW-backed sellout contract by Fiat Chrysler workers. In the run-up to the massive rejection, thousands of Fiat Chrysler workers circulated articles and statements from the WSWS opposing the sellout.

As it turned out, it was Williams, not the WSWS, who was on the take and filling his pockets with money embezzled from UAW members.

The fact that Dittes has spoken out against Lehman shows that the bureaucracy is terrified by his campaign. Indeed, he issued his statement in the midst of a successful tour by Lehman across the US, where he spoke to hundreds of autoworkers and held a successful online campaign meeting. The fact that the WSWS endorses Lehman makes him all the more terrifying because the WSWS has a decades-long track record of striving to give workers a voice and organizing opposition among the rank-and-file to the corrupt union bureaucracy. It has always sought to connect this fight with an internationalist and socialist perspective.

Workers should reject Dittes' outbursts with the contempt they deserve. The hostility of the UAW apparatus is the surest sign of the power and strength of Lehman's campaign.

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