Emboldened by Trump, Ford expands police-state searches to Chicago plant

Tim Rivers
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Last Friday, October 3, Ford Motor Company's Global Security Task Force began police-state style searches of employees at the Chicago Assembly Plant. The blatant violation of basic constitutional protections against unreasonable search and seizure coincided with and was encouraged by Trump's deployment of military troops to wage "war" on Chicago.

In recent weeks, hundreds of immigrant workers in the country's third largest city have been snatched up by Trump's ICE gestapo. Using Blackhawk helicopters and military vehicles, masked ICE thugs dragged adults and children out of a Southside apartment building last week and zip-tied them, regardless of their immigration status. Federal agents have fired tear gas, pepper balls, rubber bullets, and, in an at least one incident, real bullets against peaceful protesters outside of the ICE detention center in the Chicago suburb of Broadview, 30 miles from the Ford plant.

Ford's surprise searches, first conducted by undercover police and tracking dogs, began in Michigan just 11 days after Trump's inauguration. From the first word of the searches, rank-and-file workers have expressed outrage at the complicity of United Auto Workers officials who echoed management's lies that the searches were to protect workers.

UAW Local 551 officials at Chicago Assembly are doing the same. A post on the UAW551 Strong Facebook page simply stated: "Random bag checks at turnstiles!!! You have been informed!!!" Far from representing workers and defending workers' rights, the UAW bureaucracy is making it clear it will sanction the suspension or firing of any worker who refuses to be treated like a prison inmate.

The local union leadership includes trustee and former vice president Scott Houldieson a leading member of the now-defunct Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD) faction of the UAW bureaucracy, which backed Shawn Fain's election and sellout of the 2023 contract fight. Houldieson's collusion with Ford's searches shows his real attitude to workers democracy.

On the national level, Fain, who has been silent on the searches, has embraced Trump's tariffs and nationalist "Make America Great Again" economic policies. In so doing, he is lining up with Trump's corporate oligarchs and dividing UAW members from their class brothers and sisters throughout the world, including Ford workers fighting plant closures and mass layoffs in Germany.

The same day as the searches in Chicago, workers at the sprawling Ford Rouge Complex in Dearborn, Michigan just west of Detroit, denounced the suspension and firing of workers who refused to be searched at their plant.

Supporters of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) distributed the Socialist Equality Party statement "Trump's fascist conspiracy and how to fight it: A socialist strategy," with the IWA-RFC statement, entitled "Halt the police-state searches at Ford factories! Reinstate every victimized worker!"

The latter statement includes the following call by Mack Trucks worker and leader of the IWA-RFC Will Lehman:

> Rank-and-file workers in the auto industry and every sector must oppose the attack on Ford workers. That means upholding the principle that "an injury to one is an injury to all!" and demanding the immediate reinstatement of all

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victimized workers, with full back pay, and a halt to these police-state style searches...

Ford's executives have been emboldened to trample over the rights of workers by Trump's deployment of ICE Gestapo agents to raid workplaces, including Hyundai's EV battery plant in Georgia, and the military occupations of Los Angeles and Washington D.C. [and now Chicago and Portland.] They have also been encouraged by the craven cowardice and complicity of UAW President Shawn Fain and the rest of the UAW apparatus with the Trump administration.

In every factory and workplace, workers must build rank-and-file committees, controlled democratically by workers themselves, to discuss a strategy and prepare for collective action to defend democratic rights. A critical fight against dictatorship involves the fight to expand the democratic control of the workplace and end the corporate dictatorship enforced by both corporate-controlled parties and their cronies in the UAW bureaucracy.

A worker heading into the plant commented, "We knew Trump was going to be a dictator when he got elected." He and several co-workers fumed at the cowardice and complicity of the Democratic Party and union apparatus.

"The Democrats haven't done anything to stop him, and the union hasn't either," one said. "We all know the union is corrupt. They are part of management. Even the new hires know that." He strongly agreed with the call to form committees of rank-and-file workers to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shop floor.

Referring to Trump's comments to the top military brass in Virginia last week, he said, "He told the generals they will be conducting military operations in cities across America in preparation for civil war against the American people and anybody who doesn't like it should resign. Now that's a dictator," he repeated. "The same thing is happening here in the plant, and we're going to have to put a stop to it."

Workers have reported that searches are being conducted by non-Ford employees who wear masks and do not identify themselves, demanding that workers empty out their personal belongings. They do not produce a warrant and have not shown any probable cause of a violation of the law. Workers who fail to comply face discipline or even termination.

A co-worker referred to the democratic rights established in the American Revolution against the King of England and the Civil War against the slave-owning aristocracy. "This is no longer a government of the people, by the people and for the people," he said. "No, it is government of the rich, by the rich and for the rich."

Workers with 10 years seniority and more, perfect attendance and not a blemish on their records are being written up for the least little thing and sent home for 30 days without pay.

"Ever since that contract, they have been trying to find any reason to fire people," he said. "All the union says is, 'We're going to file a grievance.' But I've seen a grievance last for years. That is no answer."

At the same time, new hires are assigned to operate robots with no training. "If somebody is injured, they will sweep it under the rug, and the union does nothing," he said.

Fill out the form below to join the fight for rank-and-file committees to defend the right to safe, secure and good-paying jobs and put an end to dictatorship, inside and outside the plants.

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