

“People in the plant are ready to fight”: Ford Rouge workers speak out in defense of co-worker victimized for opposing Trump

Our Reporters
14 January 2026

Ford workers at the sprawling Rouge Complex in Dearborn, Michigan, are speaking out in defense of Thomas “TJ” Sabula, an assembly line worker who was suspended without pay after denouncing President Donald Trump during the president’s visit to the plant on Tuesday.

As Trump toured the factory floor, Sabula shouted denunciations at the president, including calling him a “pedophile protector,” a reference to Trump’s long-established association with Jeffrey Epstein and efforts by the political establishment to bury the full truth about Epstein’s connections.

Trump responded with rage. The president shouted obscenities at Sabula and, as he walked away, raised his middle finger in the worker’s direction. The exchange was recorded on video by another Ford worker, quickly circulated on social media, and broadcast on national television.

There has been an outpouring of support for Sabula, a 40-year-old assembly-line worker and member of United Auto Workers Local 600. As of Wednesday night, two GoFundMe pages set up on his behalf have received more than \$800,000 in donations from over 30,000 contributors.

After the flood of support, the UAW was forced to break its silence and issue a statement more than 24 hours after the incident claiming the union would “ensure that our member receives the full protection of all negotiated contract language safeguarding his job and his rights as a union member.”

William, a Ford Rouge worker, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Sabula’s stand expressed sentiments shared widely among workers.

“TJ Sabula has stood up to Trump more than any of

our elected officials. They won’t stand up. I mean both the Republican and Democratic parties. I might as well add the UAW union officials who bend over.

“I find it disgusting the way the media and the Trump administration is spinning the ICE murder of Renee Good. We are told not to believe what we see! I think the mask is coming off. I feel very strongly that a general strike is key.”

A Dearborn Truck Ford worker with 11 years at the plant described Trump’s behavior and the broader political situation.

“It’s just pitiful and sad that the president of the United States can do these things. He shouldn’t be president. He has no business being president. He has a whole bunch of felonies. If you had a felony you couldn’t get a job.

“A lot of people like himself back him up. People with money. If you have money you can do anything and get away with anything.

“We can voice our opinion, but nothing is being done against Trump. All this stuff this man is doing and there are no consequences. You go out and do just one thing and you pay for it. He suffers no consequences.

“Not Congress, not the Democrats. There are no checks and balances. Just talking. I’m flabbergasted. It’s like a bad dream.

“Ford workers are going to catch a lot of hell with him being down there. Co-workers called me and said Trump was coming here tomorrow. I said you’ve got to be kidding. And when he gets down there he’s flipping off workers.

“His intentions are no good, and (Executive Chairman) Bill Ford is behind it. Mr. Ford and CEO Jim Farley are standing up there talking with him. It’s

pitiful! They're saying the F-150 pickup truck is doing real good since Trump's tariffs. Without them, they say, Ford would not be doing so good.

"Trump asks, 'Do you make trucks here?' He didn't even know!

"As for (UAW President Shawn) Fain, he's two-faced. He was all against Trump and then he turned around and backed his tariffs. All these people have money.

"People were mad yesterday. Their lockers were cut off. There were protests at the casino where Trump spoke."

Another DTP worker described the conditions surrounding Trump's visit and the atmosphere inside the plant.

"Nobody told us that Trump was coming to the plant. All we got was a text that the plant was going to be locked down between 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Nobody was supposed to leave their workstation during that time. They were talking about canceling the shift.

"The workers from REV-C (Rouge Electric Vehicle Center) that are coming to the plant to train for the relaunch of C Crew at DTP were told not to come in.

"I'm on night shift. By the time I came to work, everybody was sharing that video of the employee who called Trump a 'pedophile protector.' You see Trump pointing at him and shouting, 'F**k you,' and you can hear workers all around him cat-calling and jeering the president.

"The guy who called him out had 20 years seniority and they suspended him on the spot. People on the floor agreed with him. Trump is a pedophile. And now they say Bill and Hillary Clinton are refusing to answer questions about Epstein.

"When I woke up today, the first thing I saw on the phone was an employee post on Facebook with the video of Trump walking with Bill Ford Jr. through the plant. I've seen people get fired for posting things from the plant. When I got to work, rumors were flying in the plant.

"On top of that, I'm watching these crazy ICE raids in Minneapolis where they killed that innocent woman [Renee Nicole Good]. That was terrible. People are getting injured and hurt in these ICE raids across the country."

A young Dearborn Truck worker emphasized the broader political meaning of the response to Sabula's

suspension.

"People in the plant and beyond are ready to fight. You can see that from the response to the GoFundMe page. There is a growing and very widespread anti-Trump sentiment. The working class is primed and ready to fight. Workers are standing up for one another.

"The UAW is supporting Trump every day. I see the lives of people are being hurt. They are starving. They are facing hardship and they are tired of it. The unions do not fight for the people by organizing workers as a class independent from the capitalist class and their hangers on. Our job is getting people to understand what it is. They have to fight. We have to set out a program for a struggle for power by the working class, not reforms.

"My fiancée has a job in social services where her responsibility is to find the resources that people need. The cuts are so bad that all she can do is offer rooms for them to sit down and cry. That hurts so much."

The suspension of TJ Sabula is not an isolated disciplinary action but a warning aimed at the entire working class. Trump's tirade, carried out with the backing of Ford management and enforced by the UAW bureaucracy, exposes the reality of "free speech" under conditions of growing authoritarianism.

The mass response in Sabula's defense demonstrates the depth of opposition to Trump and the political establishment and the immense social power that exists among workers. The decisive question posed by the events at the Rouge plant is how this opposition can be organized independently of the corporations, the political parties and the union bureaucracy, which functions to suppress rather than mobilize workers' struggles.

This means building rank-and-file committees in every factory, under the direction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, to demand the reinstatement of Sabula with full back pay and the defense of the democratic and social rights of all workers.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact