

While Ford Kentucky Truck UAW officials pad their salaries, conditions at plant worsen

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The recent audit of the finances of United Auto Workers Local 862 at the Ford Kentucky Truck Plant (KTP) in Louisville illustrates the chasm that separates the privileged union apparatus from rank-and-file workers struggling to make ends meet.

KTP is one of Ford's largest North American manufacturing facilities and a major profit center for the company, employing over 8,000. Production workers at KTP and the neighboring Louisville Assembly Plant (LAP) are members of United Auto Workers Local 862.

The results of the Local 862 audit, published in December, documented large, unexplained salary increases for top local officers; the disbursement of union funds to businesses owned by officers or their relatives without competitive bidding or documentation; and other irregularities. These include the holding of pre-signed checks, unauthorized debit card purchases, missing receipts for hundreds of expense vouchers, and lax controls over overtime approvals and other disbursements.

At the same time that corrupt Local 862 leaders have been stuffing their own pockets, a broader scandal has erupted in the UAW as a whole. As documented in recent reports by the court-appointed UAW monitor, the UAW apparatus headed by Shawn Fain maintains a "toxic culture of division and retaliation at the highest levels of the organization." This has included the use of frame-up tactics against factional rivals on the International Executive Board, including Secretary-Treasurer Margaret Mock and Vice President Rich Boyer, to strip them of their duties.

Fain was elected as a "reform" candidate in a fraudulent election process that saw massive voter suppression. The direct election of top UAW officers came about following a federal investigation that saw 15 previous top union leaders jailed for corruption and embezzlement of \$1.5 million in workers' dues for luxury items, golf trips, and other lavish expenditures. As well several top officials were found to have colluded with corporate management to impose substandard contracts.

Among the facts cited in the Local 862 audit report, Local 862 President Todd Dunn saw his salary nearly double, rising from \$58,200 to \$114,000 during the period from 2021 to November 2025 covered by the audit. Vice President Marcus

Sheckles' salary increased by more than 40 percent, from \$103,621 to \$141,370. Financial Secretary Rodney Janes' pay rose from \$82,375 to \$115,028, an increase of over 40 percent.

In addition to the bloated salaries, a number of abuses of union funds were discovered by the audit process, including unauthorized union debit card purchases, travel fees for room upgrades, car rentals, flight upgrades, and thousands of dollars in fines for late IRS filings.

Dunn backed the 2023 sellout contract and the phony "stand-up" strike, calling it "the best contract we've seen in two decades." Meanwhile, he has colluded with Ford management to institute random bag searches under the pretext of ferreting out guns and drugs.

As of this writing, no Local 862 officers have been formally cited or disciplined as a consequence of the audit report.

Since 2023 all of the auto companies have carried out mass layoffs, including the wholesale firing of temporary workers who were falsely promised full time jobs. The UAW has not opposed any of these attacks, including the recent layoff off 1,100 workers at General Motors Factory Zero EV plant in Detroit and layoffs at the Ford's Dearborn REV C plant and Blue Oval SK battery operations in Kentucky.

One Kentucky Truck worker noted ironically on Facebook, "Many have been walked out of the plant for stealing less. Folks have lost their jobs for stealing food out of the little food areas..."

Louisville workers at KTP and LAP have faced decades of stagnating wages, wave after wave of layoffs, increasing line-speed demands, unsafe job conditions, and a union leadership that has pushed concession contracts while their own salaries have skyrocketed.

The struggles of auto workers in Louisville are taking place amid a broader social crisis. Soaring housing costs and inflation are rapidly eroding living standards. The effects of years of wage stagnation have led to various forms of despair, with alcoholism and opioid addiction widespread in the population and among workers in the auto plants. There are reports of people overdosing in the parking lots of KTP. The vast majority of auto workers cannot afford the vehicles they make. Many have reported being homeless at some point. Some are living in their cars.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with “D,” a worker hired into Kentucky Truck Plant in 2016, about conditions inside the plant.

D said she “got really lucky, because right before I got made full time they were going to take us from supplemental short-term, or something like that, to TPT (temporary part-time). I was really just there to fill in for the summer while people were on vacation or medical leave. They were going to make us TPT and have us do three days a week, but I didn’t have to do that because I got lucky—I got hired in. But there were people who were hired just a month or two after me who had to be a temp for over a year, close to two years. When I was a temp, you couldn’t call in. You couldn’t miss anything. Now they have benefits.”

D added, “It took me eight years to get top pay. Now it is only three years. In 2016, you would get a raise each year on your seniority day. In 2019, the contract changed so that you get your raise after 52 weeks worked instead of on your seniority day, which pushed the timeline back further. My question is, if the contract is only four years, why was it taking eight years when things can change every contract?”

D spoke about the 2023 contract and the “stand-up strike,” which divided the membership by keeping the most profitable plants working while only a relative handful of workers were on strike.

“We did get a pay raise, but when raises have stagnated over the years, and in all the contracts prior to 2023 it wasn’t a significant raise, we are still behind. Only on paper does it look like we got a raise.

“When I started, I was making \$15 per hour. That is two dollars more than the starting pay of \$13 per hour in 1995. That is two dollars more than 21 years later. The raises are split up. This year I will get a 3 percent raise. Next year I will get a 3 percent raise. I think the last year before we get a new contract we will get 4 percent.

“The biggest thing that we wanted, and did not get, was healthcare after retirement through Ford. Currently, as it stands, if I were to retire, I would not get healthcare. This is crazy because you spend thirty years of your life breaking down your body for a company, and literally the least thing they could do is provide you with healthcare.”

D explained the difficulty workers have experienced living on the meager pay boosts they have received. “I live in an apartment now that I am paying \$2,000 a month for. I could buy a house, but there are barriers I can’t cross. I don’t have enough for a down payment. I don’t have enough all at once. I have student loans too. On paper it looks like you make so much money, but I still live paycheck to paycheck like everyone else. My rent has gone up by \$1,000 since 2017. It used to be that when you renewed your lease, it would be 20 or 30 bucks for the next year, but now it’s 150 or 200 bucks every time. My parents are getting older, and we are looking at getting a house together. The houses are half a million dollars.”

whoD spoke about the two weeks Kentucky Truck Plant workers were on strike in 2023. Prior to this, the UAW had only called out one other Ford plant and only part of another. “Before we went on strike, I really thought they would not send KTP out because we make so much money. I feel like the whole thing was performative anyway. They were only sending one plant out at a time. If we’re going to go on strike, why are we not all going on strike? That is going to send a real message. A lot of people at work feel our union is weak.”

She cited ways the union was colluding with Ford management at the plant. “There was one day at work when a sewage pipe broke and there was inches of sewage on the line where people were working. They didn’t even shut it down. People were posting pictures of it on Facebook. They made them work. The union should have come and said, ‘We are not working over here until this gets cleaned up.’”

The WSWS asked who workers were supposed to contact to raise safety concerns.

D said, “You would call health and safety, and then they would come out and assess what happens next or if they need to stop production. They either determine that it is not safe or they give the okay and say it’s fine.”

The WSWS noted that random bag searches were taking place at KTP and other Ford plants. “Things are getting tighter,” D said. “They have undercover people working in the plant. They have an iPhone set up on certain jobs to take pictures, and they are there all of the time, always plugged in. I don’t know if they are recording video or not. There are cameras for certain things, but they are more pointed at the vehicle.

“Within the last couple of years, they have had cameras in the break room to make sure people don’t steal snacks.”

This reporter explained that the WSWS called for the formation of rank-and-file committees controlled by workers to oversee health and safety. These committees would unite workers in different plants and industry and seek to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shop floor.

Reflecting on the situation, D expressed support for rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracy. “When your union is not doing what they’re supposed to be doing,” she said, “that’s how we’ll get things done—by working together.”

The revelations of financial irregularities at UAW Local 862 are likely just the tip of the iceberg. Combined with worsening conditions on the shop floor, the gulf between autoworkers and the apparatus that claims to represent them is underscored. For more information on building a rank-and-file committee at your plant fill out the form at the end of the article.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact