

“The UAW is stealing from the retired”: Ford Kentucky Truck workers respond to exposure of union corruption and unsafe conditions

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Are you a Kentucky Truck Plant worker? Fill out the form at the end of this article to join the fight for rank-and-file committees.

The World Socialist Web Site report on the audit of United Auto Workers Local 862, the blatant corruption of UAW local officials and deteriorating conditions at the Ford Kentucky Truck Plant (KTP) has triggered a significant response from workers, rapidly making it one of the most widely read articles on the site over the weekend. Workers from KTP and beyond came forward in large numbers to confirm the findings, describe their own experiences, and express support for independent rank-and-file organization.

The article detailed findings from a financial audit released in December showing large, unexplained salary increases for top union officials, improper use of union funds, and the absence of any disciplinary action against those responsible. These revelations stand in stark contrast to the reality facing workers on the shop floor, where injuries, unsafe conditions, stagnant wages and intensified production demands continue unabated.

The WSWS article also placed these developments within the broader crisis engulfing the UAW nationally, following years of federal investigations, convictions of top officials and the endorsement of pro-company contracts that have failed to halt layoffs, speedups and the erosion of living standards. None of this was changed through the installation of supposed “union reformer” Shawn Fain in the 2022-23 UAW election, which was marred by vast voter suppression sanctioned by the UAW Monitor and the US Labor Department under both the Biden and Trump administrations.

Since the publication of the WSWS article, workers have come forward in significant numbers to share their

own experiences and voice support for the formation of rank-and-file committees, to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to workers on the shop floor. Their written comments to the WSWS underscore not only anger over corruption, but a deep sense of betrayal by the union apparatus.

Reflecting this reality, one worker stated plainly, “The UAW is stealing from the retired,” capturing in a single sentence the outcome of decades of concessions that have shifted liability for retiree health care from the company to retired workers themselves. At the same time, the multi-billion-dollar retiree health care trusts have provided further income for the UAW apparatus.

Another worker emphasized that the problem extends far beyond individual corruption. “The more you look the more you will see. This has been happening for years. Both white and blue collar,” the worker said, drawing parallels between union corruption and broader political decay. “Look at your government. Where would you like to start? There is plenty to go around.” He concluded, “When you know something is wrong, something right is telling you,” pointing to a growing awareness among workers that the existing structures do not serve their interests.

Workers also described how the union has collaborated with management to impose sellout contracts, most recently the 2023 agreement hailed as “historic” by Fain.

One worker wrote:

We’ve lost wages because of them ‘rebalancing’ the lines. So basically everything

we negotiated for during last contract in regards to a raise has all been for naught and not only are we NOT making more money but we've actually LOST money. I believe the company has preplanned this to 'save' costs, but at the expense of hard working union members AND our union is doing NOTHING about it.

Workers in companies who supply parts to Ford pointed to similar patterns of layoffs and restructuring, alongside pay increases for management and new hires brought in under inferior conditions. "Based off this article I feel like [the plant] should be looked at too," a worker at a Magna metal stamping plant in Bowling Green, Kentucky said, noting repeated layoffs of hourly workers.

Workers shared accounts of unsafe working conditions and the UAW's refusal to protect them. One worker described working with outdated and dangerous equipment: "The forklift situation should be addressed. We are working with old equipment that needs to be upgraded," he said, noting that basic safety improvements have been ignored despite repeated complaints.

Another worker recounted a devastating personal experience that illustrates the human cost of this neglect.

Me personally, I have experienced safety issues with my job. The union has came out multiple times, as well as the company people. They have used their tools and stop watches to measure and my job has failed in multiple aspects. NOTHING has been done in the three years I have been complaining. Since, I have fell, broke my back, been sent to the hospital, had a couple seizures, been put into a coma, missed a month of work, and Ford does NOT want to take responsibility and I have no way of proving they are at fault. I'm literally breaking my back (nine fractures in my spine). I'm a 32-year-old male who used to run mini marathons and play in the work softball league and that has all been halted in the last two years.

Taken together, these responses confirm the central conclusion of the WSWs report: the UAW apparatus functions as an arm of corporate management, not a defender of workers. The growing willingness of workers to speak out reflects a developing consciousness that real change will only come through the formation of rank-and-file organizations, independent of the union bureaucracy. As the injured worker put it simply, "I think this would give us, the workers, a voice."

For information on building rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



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