

Thomas “TJ” Sabula is back at work—but the lessons must be learned

Statement of the Ford Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee

15 February 2026

The Ford Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee has received reports that Brother Thomas “TJ” Sabula has returned to work at the Dearborn Truck Plant after being suspended without pay for calling Donald Trump a “pedophile protector” during the president’s January 13 tour of the plant. According to United Auto Workers Vice President Laura Dickerson, Sabula has retained his job and has “no discipline on his record.”

We welcome our courageous brother back. His return is not a gift from management, the White House or the UAW bureaucracy. It is the result of massive public support from working people across the country and around the world.

When TJ spoke out, Trump responded with obscenities and gave him the middle finger. Reports indicate Trump demanded he be fired. Ford immediately suspended him without pay. This was not about “shop rules.” It was a political message: workers who speak out against the powerful will be punished.

The White House and Ford management wanted to make an example of TJ. They wanted to intimidate every worker at the Rouge and beyond. They wanted to send the message that political dissent on the shop floor will not be tolerated.

But that is not what happened.

Within hours, working people rallied behind him. More than \$800,000 was raised through GoFundMe donations. Tens of thousands contributed. This overwhelming support changed the situation. It showed that millions of people are sick and tired of the corrupt oligarchy Trump represents.

The UAW bureaucracy is now trying to take credit for TJ’s return. This is false.

They did not issue a strong public defense when he was suspended. They did not organize protests. They did not mobilize the membership. Their response only

came after the outpouring of public support made it impossible to remain silent.

Let’s be clear: the UAW International and Local 600 leadership signed off on Trump’s visit. The visit was concealed from the membership and the public to prevent opposition. Dearborn is home to one of the largest Arab populations in the United States. Had workers and residents known in advance, there could have been mass demonstrations.

But this is the last thing the UAW apparatus wanted. UAW President Shawn Fain is in a de facto alliance with Trump. He backs Trump’s tariffs and repeats the lie that attacking Mexican, Canadian and other workers somehow helps American workers. Economic nationalism divides us and weakens us. It does not defend jobs or democratic rights.

This episode teaches important lessons.

First, the corporations and the government are hostile to the democratic rights of the working class. If a worker can be suspended for speaking out politically, then freedom of speech means nothing inside the workplace. The First Amendment does not stop at the factory gate.

Second, the union apparatus cannot be relied on to defend our rights. The bureaucracy works hand in hand with management and both corporate-controlled parties. Their priority is “labor peace” and protecting their own positions, not defending rank-and-file workers.

Third, only the broad mobilization of the working class can defend democratic rights. TJ’s reinstatement came because working people acted. Statements and small donations from thousands gave a glimpse of the real social power that exists when workers stand together.

But there is no room for complacency.

What happened in Minneapolis—the repression of

protests, the targeting of immigrants and the murder of political opponents—shows that Trump is moving to install a dictatorship. Immigrants were the first targets. But attacks on democratic rights will not stop there. The methods used against immigrants today are being prepared to use against striking workers tomorrow.

The Epstein revelations have also exposed the rot at the top of society. The entire ruling class and both of its political parties are mired in corruption and decadence. They close ranks to protect themselves. They will not defend our rights.

If we want to protect ourselves, workers must organize independently.

That is why we call for the building of rank-and-file committees at the Rouge and in every Ford plant. These committees must be controlled by workers ourselves—not by union officials. They must be democratic, with representatives elected and subject to recall, and based on the methods of the class struggle, not class collaboration.

Such committees can:

- Defend any worker targeted for political speech or shop-floor activity.
- Organize meetings so workers can discuss and decide on action collectively.
- Link up with workers at other Ford and auto plants, suppliers and other workplaces.
- Break down the divisions promoted by nationalism and unite workers across borders.

Power must be transferred from the UAW apparatus to the shop floor.

These policies are at the center of the campaign of Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker who just announced his candidacy for UAW president. Lehman is running on a program to abolish the UAW bureaucracy as a privileged layer and transfer power directly to rank-and-file workers through democratic shop-floor committees. He calls for international unity of workers and the complete independence of the working class from both big business parties.

The Ford Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee endorses and supports Will Lehman's campaign. His fight is our fight.

The support for TJ showed what is possible. But spontaneous support is not enough. It must be organized into lasting structures that can respond immediately to any attack.

An injury to one is an injury to all is not just a slogan. It must be a practice.

We repeat: we welcome Brother Sabula back to work. His courage inspired workers everywhere. His reinstatement shows that when workers act together, we can push back.

But the forces that targeted him—the White House, corporate management and a compliant union bureaucracy—have not changed. They are preparing new attacks: layoffs, speed-up, plant closures and further assaults on democratic rights.

We urge all Rouge workers:

Talk to your co-workers.

Discuss these lessons.

Join and build the Ford Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee in your department and shift.

Establish lines of communication independent of the union apparatus.

Only through our own independent organization can we defend free speech, protect our jobs and prepare for the struggles ahead.

TJ's return is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of a broader struggle.

Now is the time to organize.

To join the Ford Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee, fill out the form below.



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