

Ford workers speak out against sexual harassment, UAW corruption

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) and the *Autoworker Newsletter* recently spoke to workers at Ford's Chicago Assembly Plant, the Ford River Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan, and the Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne, Michigan over reports of sexual abuse by management at Ford. Ford Motor Company earlier this month agreed to pay \$10.1 million to settle claims heard before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) by female autoworkers that they faced widespread harassment at both the Chicago Assembly Plant and a stamping plant in suburban Chicago Heights.

Keith Hunt, lawyer for the workers in a separate class-action lawsuit, presented evidence that more than 1,500 female workers were subject to sexual abuse and racial harassment by both Ford management and UAW officials from 2012 to 2014. The case is at least the second to arise at the plants since the 1990s.

The report of the settlement comes in the wake of reports of gross corruption involving high level officials of the United Auto Workers. According to documents filed by federal prosecutors, Fiat Chrysler Vice President for Employee Development Alphons Iacobelli funneled more than \$4.5 million to UAW executives to encourage them "to take company-friendly positions" over the course of the last decade, placing a question mark over all the contracts they negotiated.

UAW officials named in the case to date include retired UAW Associate Director Virdell King, who worked as a senior official in the UAW Chrysler Department between 2008 and 2016; the late General Holiefield, a former UAW vice president and lead negotiator with Chrysler; and Holiefield's widow, Monica Morgan. Both King and Holiefield participated in the UAW national negotiating committee.

Speaking about allegations of sexual abuse at Ford, one autoworker with six years at Chicago Assembly told the *World Socialist Web Site Auto Worker Newsletter*, "The harassment is true, and I've seen the racial part of it. They dog you out if you make a mistake, they don't commend

you if you do good work. They're showing favoritism, they're not respecting seniority, and it's creating a lot of conflict. People are getting angry, and I feel like they have the right to get angry if they put the time in and they're not being respected for it.

"They ask you, 'Can you come in early? Can you work through lunch?' There's a lot people busting their ass to build these cars that we can't even afford. It's BS."

At the River Rouge complex in Michigan, a skilled trades worker also reported harassment. "It's been going on for years. There was a manager here at Rouge who was doing the same thing. The company was moving him around to different locations. And they moved the women too to different plants to cover it up. The company was protecting him.

"Finally a young girl recorded him on her phone telling her that he would give her overtime if she gave him a blow job. She turned it in, so they couldn't cover it up any longer. They fired him.

"It takes a special type of person to be in management at Ford, and it's not a nice person. They will do anything to make the company money. The company doesn't care as long as they are making money. That is why they cover it up. It is not a pleasant work environment."

Many female workers at Rouge confirmed the widespread practice of sexual harassment. A worker with 10 years seniority said, "It happened to me."

"I had to go up front and report it," she continued. "But the company did nothing about it. The supervisor finally got fired, but I'm sure he got his job back. They moved the women around to protect him. They want an atmosphere of intimidation."

"I see it all the time," added a female co-worker. "The morale is terrible in there. They abuse people," adding a sentiment that many workers expressed, "Thank you very much for being out here."

In Chicago, Ford workers frequently laughed with contempt when asked about the UAW bribery allegations. "It doesn't surprise me," or, "Of course they are," were

common remarks. “The UAW is Ford,” summed up one veteran worker.

“It’s bad when the union gets paid by the employer,” said another worker with five years. “I mean, when that happens, the union works for them. You’re not your own entity. So if the company says, ‘This is what we want,’ the union is going to say, ‘This is what we want’ too. We want to fight what management is doing to us, but the union reps are just agreeing to it.

“A lot of people, I would say 70 percent, if they were able to choose wouldn’t be in the union. Back in the day it used to be beneficial, but now there’s no benefit. But you’re forced to be in it, it’s not like you have an option.”

Commenting on the consequences of the current contract, a worker at Rouge who has been on temporary status for three years said, “I have been cursing out the union every day because I have been here as a temp all this time, and they always say they are not hiring full time.”

Under the contract, conditions in factories across the country have rapidly deteriorated. A central demand of workers at the time of the negotiations was the reversal of the hated two-tier system, introduced a decade ago as supposedly a temporary measure, which pits new hires against more senior co-workers.

The 2015 agreement maintained the two tier structure and allowed the company to introduce private contractors and different categories of temporary workers, further splitting the workforce with multiple tiers at different rates of compensation. In the process, job security has disappeared.

A worker with only a few years until retirement at the Michigan Assembly Plant (MAP) in Wayne responded bitterly to the reports of federal indictments of UAW negotiators. “[Former UAW president] Bob King got out before his ass was on the line,” he said. “They are a business. They profit off of us.

“The federal government wants to control everything today,” the autoworker continued. “They used the federal courts to steal their pensions in Detroit. Now they are going to go after mine.

“Ford gave the executives a \$500,000 buyout for them to walk away. [Former Ford CEO] Mark Fields got \$20 million. Then Ford negotiated a 2 percent raise for us. [UAW President] Dennis Williams gave himself a 7.2 percent raise. And [UAW Vice President for Ford] Jimmy Settles got a 6.2 percent raise. They gave that to themselves.

“UAW members as a whole have paid into the strike fund for years. Where did all that money go?” he demanded to know. “They raised our dues to build up the strike fund. But we have not been on strike. If that money was there, they could pay us \$1,000 per week to go on strike.

“I don’t support the union at all. They all think they are

better than you are. They are doing everything they can to push me out the door. They want all new hires and temps.”

He went on to explain the situation at MAP since implementation of the 2015 contract. “The body shop is full of temporary workers and low seniority people. They keep them at 30 hours a week.

“They work the temp’s for four eight-hour days. They’ll come in an hour after we start and leave an hour before we leave. They get no benefits. Ford matches their contributions to a 401K up to \$200 per month. That’s it.”

When the current national auto contract was headed for defeat in 2015, UAW Local 600 at the Rouge complex became the focus of last-ditch efforts by the union to impose the pro-company agreement. A grievance later filed by a worker presented widespread evidence of ballot fraud, but was rejected at both the local and national level within the union.

UAW Vice President Jimmy Settles, originally from Local 600, was head of contract negotiations at Ford. He convened a press conference to use the corporate media in an effort to strong-arm workers into voting “yes.” The move backfired when a video shot by reporters for the WSWWS showing UAW goons physically removing them from the press conference went viral on Facebook and was passed from hand to hand on the factory floor.

“We have known about corruption for years. It is finally coming out,” the worker continued. “Jimmy Settles is nothing but a mobster. You saw that when your man was thrown out of the press conference at Local 600.

“What they were doing was illegal. There was too much money involved. The real ballots went in the Detroit River, or someplace. Everyone I talked to voted ‘no.’ How did they get all those ‘yes’ votes?”

The WSWWS *Autoworker Newsletter* calls on workers to move now to form rank-and-file factory committees. All officials associated with the UAW gangster union should be banned from the shop floor, work locations and all meetings of workers. The factory committees should declare the previous contracts null and void and assume control of the negotiation of all new agreements.



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