

UAW apologists try to cover up corruption scandal

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On September 12 at 7:00 pm EDT, the WSWs Autoworker Newsletter is hosting an online meeting to discuss the strategy and perspective needed to organize this struggle. To participate, visit wsws.org/autocall.

On the eve of the September 14 contract expiration, the United Auto Workers (UAW) is engulfed in a massive corruption scandal implicating its top executives in multimillion-dollar bribery schemes. Organizations and publications in and around the UAW apparatus have responded by trying to buttress its political stranglehold over autoworkers.

Some, including the *Nation* and *In These Times*, are completely silent. Others, like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the DSA-aligned *Jacobin* publication and some other pseudo-left groups, have rallied to the defense of the UAW.

On September 8, after remaining silent for weeks, *Jacobin* posted an interview with Sean Crawford, a GM worker in Flint, Michigan and member of the DSA, under the title, “When union corruption detracts from a strike.”

In the introduction to the interview, Jane Slaughter, a DSA member and the former editor of the *Labor Notes* publication, writes that current bargaining has “been further complicated” by the arrests of UAW officials and the recent FBI raid of the suburban Detroit home of UAW President Gary Jones.

In fact, the “bargaining” has not been “complicated.” It has been exposed as a complete farce. Those overseeing the “negotiations” have been convicted for taking millions in bribes in exchange for signing and enforcing pro-company contracts.

Asked by Slaughter if the scandal is affecting how workers feel about the UAW leadership, the contract and the possibility of a strike, Crawford answers: “Absolutely. Nobody benefits from having a weak

leadership at a time like this except the company.”

The UAW does not have a “weak leadership.” It has a leadership that is bought-and-paid-for by the auto bosses. Those who are chiefly concerned about the “weakening” of the UAW leadership are the companies and the political establishment, which fear that the UAW will not be strong enough to smother the opposition of autoworkers as it has over the last four decades. The aim of *Jacobin* is to “strengthen” the UAW by preventing the eruption of opposition independently and in opposition to it.

The corruption scandal had deeply damaged the image of the UAW, Crawford complains. “Instead of being an inspirational organization that people want to join, people look at the union as fat cats,” he says. He notes that most workers are convinced the UAW “was in cahoots with management” and that they would get nothing from the UAW. “There are a lot of folks out there who do have the same hopes for bargaining gains that I do. It’s just that the voices of cynicism have grown noticeably louder after the corruption scandal.”

That is, Crawford criticizes workers who have correctly concluded that the UAW is a bribed instrument of corporate management for being “cynical.” These workers are not being cynical, however, but entirely realistic. This is what the UAW is, despite the best efforts of Crawford, et al to deny it.

Other groups have gone so far as to assert UAW executives are the victims of a government frame-up and must be defended. This is the line of the Spartacist organization, for example, which has raised the demand for “Hands off the UAW!”

Spark, a self-described “socialist” organization whose supporters include Dearborn Truck local bargaining committeeman Gary Walkowicz, posted a September 8 editorial titled, “Federal Government

Attacks the Unions.”

“Now, mind you, to date, there have been no charges, no indictments filed against either UAW President Jones or Williams,” the statement declares. “And there may or may not ever be. But clearly, the government had an interest to create a ‘guilty until proven innocent’ situation.”

The organization compares the Justice Department’s investigation with the McCarthyite witch hunts of the 1950s, when the federal government attacked and removed socialists and other left-wing militants and political opponents from the leadership of the unions.

Such a comparison is ludicrous. The UAW leaders indicted for corruption have pleaded guilty. Not even the UAW has claimed that those who have been convicted are innocent. Instead, the union has said it is cooperating with federal prosecutors and instituting supposed reforms.

Of course, the Trump administration has its own motives, and workers cannot look to the government to defend their interests. To acknowledge this fact, however, does not mean that the prosecution of UAW officials is an attack on workers, who must, on principle, come to the defense of Jones, Dennis Williams, et al.

Far from being witch-hunted for leading militant struggles, General Holiefield, Norwood Jewell, Michael Grimes & Co. have spent their whole careers as company men imposing the dictates of the auto executives.

“This current activity of the federal agencies constitutes a real attack—against the unions, the only organizations the working class has today, and against the working class in general,” Spark insists. “What better way to break down the union and demoralize the workers in front of a fight with the bosses?”

Why would the exposure of UAW bribe-taking demoralize workers? If anything, it has strengthened their conviction that the only way they will win anything in this contract struggle is to take the conduct of the fight out of the hands of the bought-and-paid-for “bargainers.”

By falsely claiming that the unions are “the only organizations the working class has today,” the fraternity of fake-leftists and aspiring union officials is desperately trying to prevent workers from rejecting the authority of the UAW and building new organizations

of struggle.

The UAW is not a working class organization. Since 1979, when the UAW was put on the Chrysler board of directors, it has colluded to slash jobs and reduce the share of income going to workers. In return, the auto companies funneled a portion of this stolen money back to the UAW in the form of billions in corporate shares and “Joint Funds Reimbursements.”

If workers want to fight for improved wages and medical coverage, the abolition of the hated two-tier and temporary employment system and the reestablishment of the principle of equal pay for equal work, then they are going to have to fight for it themselves.

In every location, workers must elect factory committees, controlled by the rank-and-file workers and committed to fight for their demands. Workers do not need nor will they get the permission of the UAW to build these committees. On the contrary, their authority will arise from the workers themselves and their commitment to fight.



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