

Live Bait & Ammo #180:

Which side are you on, Rory, which side are you on?

How many autoworkers have died from Covid-19?

How many more UAW families are awaiting diagnosis?

Who is ultimately responsible for the health and safety of UAW families?

On March 17, Caravan Facility Management, a contractor employed by GM, fired Travis Watkins, a UAW Bargaining Chair of a unit in Amalgamated UAW Local 167. Watkins works facility skilled trades at GM Components Holding [GMCH] in Wyoming, MI.

Termination deprives Watkins of income; denies him justification of unemployment benefits; and strips Travis and his two children of health insurance in the midst of a virulent pandemic.

Management terminated Watkins because he posted on March 16, on a private Facebook page, "GMCH employees were walked out of the plant today with suspected COVID-19 symptoms . . . I've reported this to Local Leadership."

One of the employees who was removed from the plant responded to the post, "Hey one of those was me!" The UAW member then described the symptoms and reported, "I can't come back until my Dr says ok."

Besides being the Bargaining Chairman for his unit, Watkins is also the Chairman of the By-Laws Committee. He is actively involved at Local 167 E-Board meetings and regular union meetings. Caravan Facility Management provides janitors and skilled building maintenance. A few years ago when Watkins started working at GMCH most of the janitors were not paying union dues. Watkins convinced them to sign on with the UAW. For organizers, the struggle never ends.

On the morning of March 17, Watkins got a message from his supervisor stating they needed to talk. He asked a fellow worker to come to the meeting with him per Weingarten Rights because he suspected by the tone of voice it may be disciplinary.

Management denied Watkins his Weingarten Rights by refusing to allow his union brother to be present. Watkins was subsequently suspended pending

an investigation without union representation. Watkins turned in his badge and keys.

On March 18, management met with Watkins and a UAW Serving Rep from the Regional office at the union hall. Management's sole reason for immediate termination was a copy of the aforementioned Facebook post.

Management stated that the posting was a violation of Shop Rule #2: "Assaulting, fighting, threatening, intimidating, coercing, or interfering with employees or supervision."

The union filed a grievance and a request for information. The company dragged their feet. On March 30, the company declined to share any more information.

This is Watkins first infraction. He has a clean record.

Management's unjustified retaliation against Watkins constitutes threat, intimidation, and coercion. In a diabolical twist of snaky semantics, management accused Watkins of threats, intimidation, and coercion. Which is akin to the perp claiming the victim "asked for it."

Depriving a family of income and health insurance in the midst of a pandemic is a depraved assault. Management's sole basis for discipline is nothing more than a Facebook post stating a simple fact: two fellow workers were escorted from the plant because they exhibited corona virus symptoms.

Why is management so scared?

When I cannot perceive a rational explanation for a behavior, I presume that I don't have all the information.

Since management refuses to share the real reason, I think it is fair to assume the worst: they're out to get him. Watkins has a target on his back. He must be a troublemaker.

We know that management is obligated to inform the International UAW before terminating a Bargaining Chair.

So where is President Rory Gamble, the herald of reform at the helm of the UAW?

What does President Gamble's stunning inaction in regard to management's assault on our union brother say to the rank and file?

Why after two long weeks of pandemic angst hasn't President Gamble slammed his fist on the table?

How can a union president with a modicum of integrity ignore an aggravated corporate assault on a UAW family?

There's a perfectly good explanation.

As a founding member of Unite All Workers for Democracy [UAWD] Watkins and fellow members of UAWD believe that "UAW members should have the right to directly elect our International leadership. We believe One Member, One Vote is a much more democratic system of voting as opposed to the delegate system that has allowed one party to retain control of the UAW for over 70 years."

Egregious overreaction—the termination of a Bargaining Chair over a simple, factual Facebook post—raises questions:

Who is threatened by democracy?

Who is intimidated when workers stand up for their rights?

Who feels coerced by solidarity?

Rory Gamble vows to reform the UAW, but he and his Con Caucus cronies are dead set against direct democracy.

Rory Gamble may be innocent of racketeering, but in the midst of a vicious pandemic he is guilty of sitting on his hands, zipping his lips, and idly standing down as a UAW family is stripped of health insurance, income, and hope.

Gamble and the old Concession Caucus talk reform but they walk hand in hand with the company, a lurid display of partnership in pandemonic times.

While a family deprived of medical care fears for their health and safety, the silence resounding out of Solidarity House thunders in the ears of betrayed and disenfranchised members.

Which side are you on, Rory, which side are you on?

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