

# Corruption probe engulfs top UAW executives

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Former United Auto Workers Vice President Norwood Jewell is expected to plead guilty today in a US District Court in Detroit for accepting tens of thousands of dollars in bribes from Fiat Chrysler executives while he headed up the union's contract negotiations for 37,000 FCA workers in 2015.

Jewell will be the highest-ranking UAW official convicted so far in the illegal scheme that dates back at least to Jewell's predecessor, General Holiefield, who took more than \$1 million in bribes for signing pro-company contracts in 2007, 2009 and 2011.

The four-year deal Jewell "negotiated" in 2015 set the pattern for all 140,000 General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers. The agreement maintained the two-tier wage system, continued the stagnation in workers' real income and expanded the number of temporary part-time employees (TPTs), who pay union dues but have no rights.

The sellout deal led to countless injuries from speedup and exhausting schedules, along with other tragedies such as the October 20, 2017, death of Jacoby Hennings, a 21-year-old TPT who reportedly took his own life after a still unexplained dispute with union officials at Ford's Woodhaven Stamping Plant, just outside of Detroit.

According to news reports, Jewell is cooperating with federal investigators and could soon implicate other top union officials, including former UAW President Dennis Williams and current President Gary Jones. In previous plea deals, UAW officials said Williams authorized the use of company money, funneled through the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center (NTC) in Detroit, to fund union officials' air travel, golf vacations and expensive dinners.

Even more damning information may emerge from a related civil case brought by attorneys for the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center, who claim

that union and company officials were unsuspecting victims of a few bad apples and the NTC deserves restitution. Calling their bluff, attorneys for the former FCA head of labor relations, Alphons Iacobelli, who is already serving a prison term, are seeking to depose Williams and other UAW officials to show how they personally benefited from the payments and knew that payments "were made in the ordinary course of business of the NTC."

The attorneys point to the 7 percent "administrative fee" that Williams' predecessor Ron Gettelfinger demanded from the NTC annually "for the salaries and benefits payable to the UAW Leadership on the NTC payroll," along with their friends and relatives who were paid for dummy jobs at the training center.

This is not a matter of the corruption of a few individuals. Jewell did not act alone when he led the UAW's campaign of lies, intimidation and vote fraud to impose the 2015 sellout contract on workers, who had rebelled and defeated the original offer. The bribing of the UAW with both legal and illegal payments has been the "ordinary course of business" since the UAW first joined Chrysler's board of directors in 1979–80.

The joint training centers are only one of many corporatist schemes through which the UAW and the other official unions, based on nationalism and the defense of capitalism, have been integrated into the structure of corporate management and the state.

The UAW is not a "union" in any meaningful sense of the term. Along with the AFL-CIO as a whole, it is a completely bureaucratic and undemocratic organization controlled by corrupt executives who are in the top five or even one percent of income earners. Their sole role is to suppress the class struggle and to do what they can to prevent any organized opposition of workers to social inequality and the global restructuring of the

auto industry, which is now entering a new and even more brutal phase.

The real relationship between the UAW and autoworkers is demonstrated by the fact that the organization prospered and saw its assets increase even as its dues-paying membership fell from 1.5 million to 395,000. Last year, the UAW lost another 35,000 members, but according to its latest filing with the US Labor Department, its assets are worth over \$1.1 billion.

With 150,000 GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers facing a new contract battle this summer, workers are determined to reverse the decades of UAW-backed concessions, particularly since the automakers have had a decade-long string of record profits and are spending billions on stock buybacks and dividends for their richest shareholders.

As they have done for decades, the UAW and the auto companies are using plant closings, layoffs and slowing sales to beat back resistance to their plans to rid the factories of higher-paid senior workers and convert the workforce into largely low-paid temps. This was signaled by the “Super Competitive Operating Agreement” the UAW imposed on Lordstown, Ohio, workers in 2017, which allowed GM to bring in contractors, temps and other low-paid staff to save \$118 million a year. This blackmail deal, however, did nothing to save the plant, which was closed last month.

Autoworkers know the UAW is a bribed tool of management. They know the contracts the union rammed through in 2015 were the products of corruption, conspiracy and illegality and should be considered null and void. It is one thing, however, to be disgusted with the UAW and another to build a new leadership and new organizations to unite autoworkers and wage a counter-offensive. But that is exactly the challenge workers confront.

There is no time to lose. Workers should take the initiative now to begin building a network of rank-and-file factory committees in all the major plants. The conduct of the contract struggle must be taken out of the hands of the UAW. These committees should formulate the demands that autoworkers and their families need, including a 40 percent raise, the abolition of the two-tier wage system and the conversion of all temporary and contract workers into

full-timers.

Workers must be united to stop the plant closings, demand the rehiring of all laid-off and victimized workers, and fight for workers’ control over production and industrial democracy.

This year has already seen the rise of working class resistance all over the world. In Matamoros, Mexico, auto parts workers have carried out a courageous revolt, not only against US- and other foreign-owned sweatshops, but also against the unions that enforce slave-labor conditions. This coincides with the rebellion of US teachers, the “yellow vest” protests in France and the uprisings in Algeria and other countries in Africa.

The assault on jobs and living standards by the global corporations and capitalist governments all over the world must be countered by an internationally coordinated offensive by the working class. Mass social and industrial action must be fused with a socialist program, including the transformation of the giant industries into public utilities collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class.

Jerry White

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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