

Autoworkers protest as former UAW VP Norwood Jewell sentenced

By Shannon Jones
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Norwood Jewell, the former UAW Vice President for Fiat Chrysler, appeared in US District Court in Detroit Monday for sentencing for his part in the illegal scheme involving the payment of more than \$1 million in corporate bribes to UAW officials in exchange for signing pro-company agreements.

At the conclusion of the hearing US District Judge Paul Borman sentenced Jewell to a 15-month jail term, but imposed no fines or court costs despite Jewell's admitted personal misappropriation of nearly \$100,000, including lavish meals, stays at a luxury villa in Palm Springs, California, and premium liquor. The judge accepted a defense recommendation that Jewell serve his time at the minimum security Morgantown, West Virginia, facility, sometimes known as "Club Fed" because of its amenities for prisoners. Jewell does not have to report until January.

The anger and disgust of workers with the corrupt actions of the UAW leadership found a partial expression at the sentencing hearing by the attendance of a delegation of workers from Marysville Axle Plant north of Detroit that is owned by Fiat Chrysler but managed by German firm ZF. UAW Local 961 has sued the company as well as the UAW over what it says is collusion to sell the plant to a third-party company and force out the current workforce of some 700 hourly employees.

The relative leniency of Jewell's sentence is all the more striking given the fact that Jewell refused to cooperate with the ongoing federal investigation into UAW corruption. Last year Jewell's top assistant, Nancy Johnson, implicated former UAW President Dennis Williams in the illegal diversion of training center funds for all the Detroit automakers as part of her plea deal.

Judge Borman said he based his decision not to impose fines because he accepted Jewell's claim that he had no money, although the former UAW official collected a six-figure salary plus other perks and had his legal fees paid by the union. By contrast Johnson received a

\$10,000 fine in addition to jail time.

Jewell is the highest-ranking UAW official convicted in the federal corruption investigation that has already resulted in prison time for eight people, including both Fiat Chrysler executives and UAW officials. The investigation has shown that Fiat Chrysler lavished more than \$1 million on UAW officials via the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center (NTC) to influence contract negotiations going back nearly a decade. During that period the UAW surrendered massive concessions and oversaw the destruction of tens of thousands of jobs, with devastating consequences for workers and their families.

Jewell negotiated the UAW-Fiat Chrysler agreement in 2015, a sellout that was decisively rejected by workers on the first attempt by the UAW to ram it through. At several ratification meetings workers jeered Jewell. The UAW ultimately rammed through the deal that maintained the hated two-tier system and set the stage for the massive expansion of the use of super-exploited temporary and part-time workers who pay union dues but have no contractual rights.

Fiat Chrysler officials are currently negotiating a settlement over the illegal payments with the government that would involve federal oversight for up to 5 years and some \$50 million in penalties.

Speaking on behalf of his client, Jewell's attorney Michael Manley presented the former Chrysler department head as the victim of a scurrilous campaign by the news media. He claimed Jewell performed "fine service" in his previous leadership positions at General Motors, but was betrayed by corrupt subordinates when he moved to head the Chrysler department.

At the hearing, Local 961 President Mike Booth from the Marysville plant said, "Five years ago the company bought their man," insisting that Jewell had colluded with Fiat Chrysler to squelch opposition to the sale of the plant. He added, "This is not a victimless crime. Good

jobs are being killed for greed and gluttony.”

The judge also noted receiving a letter from a group of workers at the Fiat Chrysler Jeep complex in Toledo, Ohio, who are involved in a lawsuit against the UAW and management. Several groups of workers at Jeep have sued the UAW over what they say has been a continuing pattern of blatant collusion with management against workers’ interests.

In pleading for home arrest for his client rather than prison time, Manley pointed to letters of support for Jewell from a substantial list of Democratic Party politicians and heads of various UAW-affiliated non-profits that have long been bankrolled with union funds. Among those giving character references was Flint Mayor Karen Weaver. Jewell was a political “kingmaker” in the Flint area, as one lifelong resident described it, and was a key player in the Flint water crisis, backing the criminal decision to shift the city’s water source from the city of Detroit system to the polluted Flint River.

In his rebuttal federal prosecuting attorney David Gardey pointed out that the letters of support sent on behalf of Jewell did not include a single statement of support from a UAW member, outside of Jewell’s sons, who are currently enjoying fat salaries on the Solidarity House staff.

Gardey continued by expressing concern that the flagrant corruption of Jewell and his associates had betrayed the “trust” of UAW members. This is a serious matter to both management and the Trump administration, which are concerned that a militant and angry mood among workers, who have been saddled with round after round of concessions, may break out into open rebellion against management and its UAW stooges. The contract for more than 150,000 autoworkers at Ford, General Motors and Fiat Chrysler expires in mid-September with management pushing a laundry list of concession demands including the right to hire more contract workers and temporary workers and rollbacks in health insurance.

In a statement following the sentencing the UAW claimed it would win back members’ trust and “will draw the line on more concessions to an auto industry flush in profits.”

Following the sentencing a Fiat Chrysler Jeep worker from Toledo told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, “We want our fair share now that it has been proven the UAW is screwing us. We have given up raises, cost of living, pensions and benefits.

“Jewell is probably figuring the UAW will take care of

him because he didn’t cooperate against them,” the Jeep worker said.

Whether the federal investigation leads to more prosecutions or some form of government “oversight” the aim of the government is not to “reform” the UAW or restore the rights of the membership but to maintain the control and authority of the union apparatus over workers. The anti-democratic and anti-workers actions of the UAW are not an aberration but express a universal process in which the unions have become embedded in the corporate structure, serving as the right hand of management in opposing strikes and imposing concessions.

The grotesque corruption exposed in the federal investigation goes far beyond the excesses of individuals. It is the outcome of the bankruptcy of the nationalist and pro-capitalist program of the unions. These organizations have proven powerless in the face of the rise of transnational corporations that scour the world for cheap labor. They have been transformed into labor contractors offering to provide management with a cheap and well-policed workforce to maintain global “competitiveness.”

In answer the working class must have its own international strategy. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* calls for the formation of rank-and-file committees independent of the UAW to begin organizing a fightback in defense of jobs and the restoration of all past concessions. We encourage workers to participate in our call in meeting Thursday, 7:30 p.m. Eastern Time to discuss an international strategy for autoworkers.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>