

“The contract should be null and void”

Fiat Chrysler workers react to UAW corruption investigation

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29 September 2017

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* recently spoke to several Fiat Chrysler workers from Detroit to get their reaction to the continuing revelations surrounding the investigation into the illegal payoffs by Fiat Chrysler executives to top United Auto Workers (UAW) officials. Millions of dollars funneled through the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center (NTC) went to high-level union officials and FCA executives themselves.

Among those implicated are the late former UAW Vice President General Holiefield and his widow, Monica Morgan, a prominent Detroit photographer. Another former UAW official, Virdell King, pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges related to the bribery scheme. She used an NTC credit card to charge tens of thousands of dollars in personal expenses, including jewelry and designer clothes.

According to the indictments, Fiat Chrysler Vice President and chief labor negotiator Alphons Iacobelli illegally paid out some \$4.5 million in NTC funds as part of an effort to get UAW officials to take “company friendly positions.” The payouts were intended to keep the UAW officials “fat, dumb and happy,” in the words of Jerome Durden, a Fiat Chrysler financial analyst who pleaded guilty to charges stemming from the investigation.

Part of the scheme involved setting up phony charities, which were used as a conduit for funds stolen from the NTC.

King was on the UAW-Fiat Chrysler negotiating team that rammed through concessions in 2011 and 2015. The 2015 deal sparked a rebellion by autoworkers, who rallied to vote down the first deal at Fiat Chrysler by a 2-1 margin. The contract continued

the two-tier wage system, imposing an eight-year “in progression” wage scheme, expanded the use of temporary and part-time workers and continued the hated Alternative Work Schedule, which imposes rotating 10-hour shifts without the payment of overtime after eight hours.

A tier-two worker at the Fiat Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly and a reader of the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* who wished to remain anonymous over concerns of retaliation spoke to the newsletter in the wake of the bribery scandal.

The Fiat Chrysler Jefferson North plant builds the Jeep Grand Cherokee and the Dodge Durango, with a total employment of some 5,000. Fiat Chrysler CEO Sergio Marchionne has kept workers at the plant on edge about the future of the facility, implying that their jobs are dependent on improvements in productivity and profits. Workers at the plant voted down the first sellout contract deal in 2015 by more than a 2-1 margin.

“I never approved of the 2015 contract from the beginning” said the worker. “I am glad this is all coming out now and the role of [UAW Vice President for Chrysler] Norwood Jewell is coming out. He never had our best interests at heart.

“He had to have had a hand in it. Especially for someone who got a promotion to an international job after nine months on the job at General Motors.”

While Jewell has not yet been indicted, the federal investigation has revealed that he received a \$2,180 shotgun from Virdell King as a birthday present, purchased illegally using the NTC credit card.

“The last straw for me was the last local union elections at the plant. We got a new president who ran

on a platform of change, but then he appointed his best friend's son to a position at the recycle bin who had only one-and-a-half year's seniority."

She explained the recycle bin was a light-duty position that would normally be reserved for workers recovering from disabilities. "He also appointed a former steward to a job in the recycle crib. You have people who are out on sick leave who could do these jobs and you have them being filled by able bodied people."

She said a major source of anger at the plant was the expanded use of temporary and part-time workers agreed to by the UAW in the 2015 contract. "I think it is disgusting how they use part timers. There is favoritism. Some work all the time and there are others who never get scheduled. You can go months without work. A lot have quit. Chrysler wants you to put the company first, but then they won't offer you jobs. That is BS for someone who has to feed their family.

"There are some who aren't called for months, but then if they one time say they don't want to work, they are fired. They don't get profit sharing and they don't get full union representation, for whatever that is worth.

"General Holiefield's nieces and nephews got in at easy positions. People are getting fed up. All the kids of our union officials worked at one time for Caravan Knights (a facilities management service at Fiat Chrysler whose employees are under a UAW contract agreement).

Speaking about the 2015 contract she said, "A lot of people are asking for it to be revisited. It is hypocrisy.

"They [local UAW officials] are being paid to just sit in their offices. They work seven days a week on Chrysler's dime, 12 hours a day, and they are getting paid for not doing anything. They are supposed to walk the floor; they don't walk the floor.

"There may not be anyone else in the plant, and they still come in."

A worker with four years at Jefferson also spoke with the *Autoworker Newsletter*. "Everyone was fattening their own pockets while taking our wages and benefits. The contract should be null and void. They are supposed to be fighting for us, instead they are taking from us. The UAW is not out for us. They are out for themselves while at the same time they keep raising our union dues.

"They want to holler 'solidarity,' but the reality is

we are standing for ourselves. Even if what we do is right, and management is wrong, they tell us to follow management's dictates. That is wrong."

She rejected claims that top UAW officials such as Jewell and President Dennis Williams did not know about the illegal payouts. "They knew. They are acting like they didn't know, but they must have had at least a hand in it. Not doing anything about it makes them just as guilty."



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