

“Everybody wants to walk at our plant”

US autoworkers want to overturn contracts UAW signed after corporate bribes

Jerry White
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Anger is spreading throughout the auto factories and rank-and-file workers are discussing what action to take after the damning revelation that Fiat Chrysler’s former top labor negotiators bribed United Auto Workers officials to impose wage cuts and other rollbacks on workers in the labor agreements reached in 2009, 2011 and 2015.

In some plants, including the Jeep complex in Toledo, Ohio, autoworkers have discussed walking out on strike, insisting the contracts signed by corrupt UAW officials are null and void. In a class action lawsuit filed in Michigan on Monday, workers are demanding the repayment of hundreds of millions of dollars in unions dues.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* is holding an online forum this Wednesday to discuss the formation of rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the UAW, to overturn the bogus contracts and advance workers’ own demands, including the abolition of the two-tier system, the restoration of all UAW-backed concessions and the immediate transformation of temporary workers into full-time employees. (See meeting details below.)

In a plea bargain made public last week, lead Fiat Chrysler negotiator Alphons Iacobelli admitted that FCA executives funneled more than \$1.5 million in bribes to the late UAW Vice President General Holiefield and other, yet unnamed, senior UAW officials “to obtain benefits, concessions and advantages” in the collective bargaining agreements from 2009 to 2015.

Iacobelli faces up to eight years in jail for his role in laundering corporate cash through the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center in Detroit to fund credit card purchases, mortgage payments, designer clothing, air travel and lavish parties for UAW officials, while skimming hundreds of thousands of dollars for himself. On February 6, Holiefield’s widow, Monica Morgan, is expected in court to file her plea agreement, which could implicate other leading figures in the UAW.

Citing a source familiar with the investigation, the *Detroit Free Press* reported Monday that three more FCA executives and three more UAW officials are next in line to face

indictment in the growing scandal.

With the noose tightening around the national leaders at the union’s Solidarity House headquarters in Detroit, UAW President Dennis Williams posted an open letter to UAW members on the union’s web site Friday. It made the absurd claim that Iacobelli was driven solely by personal greed and that, contrary to his statements in the plea deal with the US Justice Department, the payoffs did not compromise the negotiating process.

Williams’ statement has been met with derision and scorn from workers, and despite efforts by the UAW’s public relations handlers to screen comments on the union’s web site, nearly 300—almost universally denouncing the UAW—were posted.

“Everybody wants to walk at our plant,” Raymond, a worker at FCA’s Toledo North Assembly Plant in Ohio, told the *Autoworker Newsletter*. “We’re just waiting for the word because we don’t have a contract because the one we’re working under is null and void. Everything Williams says about the payoffs not affecting the contract is a lie; nobody believes a word he says. Why would Iacobelli lie to the FBI? He’s already going to jail and that would get him into even more trouble.”

“They’re all crooks,” said Jeff, a veteran worker at the Nexteer plant in Saginaw, Michigan, which General Motors spun off with its Delphi parts division in 1999. GM took the plant back during the 2009 bankruptcy only to impose, with the collusion of the UAW, huge pay and benefit concessions before the plant was sold to a Chinese auto parts maker.

“The corruption is from the international down to the regional and local level. I was an appointed health & safety rep for many years, but the International union removed me because I couldn’t be bought. The union has become a business for fat cats. Everything Williams says is misleading and (UAW Vice President for GM) Cindy Estrada will probably be the next to be indicted.

“It’s terrible what the UAW did at Nexteer. They staged a strike with management in 2015 and sent us right back to work without anything. They are all bought off,” he concluded.

Workers at Ford and GM are just as determined to overturn the UAW-backed contracts, which were rammed through with lies, intimidation and outright vote-rigging in 2015. *Automotive News* reported Monday that federal prosecutors are investigating joint labor-management centers at Ford and GM. Iacobelli was employed as a top negotiator for GM after being eased out of FCA in 2015.

“They’re trying to make us honor a contract that is null and void,” Jackie, a full-time worker with four years at Ford’s Kansas City Assembly Plant, told the *Autoworker Newsletter*. “Williams’ statement that the contract is good is a bunch of crock.

“During the contract vote in 2015, union officials were coming down the line and doing all sorts of stuff to get workers to vote for the deal. I knew something was up when the UAW said the contract passed by 51 percent nationally when so many workers were voting it down. The voting wasn’t done in a secure area and who is to say the ballots weren’t tampered with?

“I’m a full-scale worker but my son is second-tier and my nephew is a temp. It’s sickening. I know veteran workers who say they remember when the union was strong, but it has been going downhill for decades. The UAW hasn’t just lost strength, they’ve given it away.

“Working in an auto plant used to be a good-paying job and autoworkers made a very good living. But it’s been so long since we’ve gotten a pay raise. Now, being here is like an average job. I live in a podunk little town and drive 45 miles to work so I can make \$28 an hour at Ford. A mile from where I live there’s a plant that pays \$15 an hour. With all the wear and tear on your body and all the driving, it might be worth taking that lower-paying job if I want to walk upright when I’m 60.

“Ford doesn’t pay you for the work you do, they pay you for your body. We’re working more for less. I can’t do this another 20 years. My dad retired from Ford and they’ve taken so much from the retirees. It’s not just one group, it’s everybody: retirees, first-tier, second-tier and temps who will always be temps, everybody is affected by the contract the UAW signed. It was rigged, and it’s not just Holiefield, it’s what the whole union has been turned into. Some company and union officials might be paying for what they did, but it’s we, the workers, who are paying in the long run.”

The *World Socialist Web Site* also spoke to Jenny, who was forced to relocate after GM shut its Indianapolis Stamping plant in 2011. In August 2010, rank-and-file workers chased UAW officials out of a local union meeting after they demanded that workers take a 50 percent wage cut to attract a new buyer and told them the alternative was to lose their jobs. With the assistance of the *Autoworker Newsletter*, the Indianapolis workers formed a rank-and-file group to rally opposition to the company-union blackmail.

In a statement to the WSWS, Jenny wrote, “Although I am glad the revelations about union corruption are finally coming

out, it also makes me very mad. For the past ten years (or more) the union has been stealing from the workers. And not just the money part. They have stolen their entire lives and held them in slavery on their jobs.

“In 2011, my family had to uproot and move 500 miles away from our loved ones and a house that we were still paying a mortgage on. This was when the UAW was trying to force workers to take a 50 percent cut in pay! Now we only see our children maybe once a year and our grandchildren are getting older every day. There is no amount of money you can place on these losses. Because we refused to give up half our wages to the company and the people who were supposed to represent us, they shut the plant down.

“Over the years we lost our raises, working conditions got worse and workers were laid off. The list goes on and on. Why? Because workers trusted a union that was supposed to be representing us. Now workers are learning what we all suspected: the UAW was paid off by the corporations to take everything away from us.”

The UAW corruption scandal and the case for rank-and-file committees

Date: Wednesday, January 31, 2018

Time: 8:00 PM - 9:00 PM EST / 7:00 PM – 8:00 PM CST

Login information:

You can join our meeting using GoToMeeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone. Please log in here to join at the time of the call.

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