

Evidence that Norwood Jewell was bribed to sign 2015 UAW-Fiat Chrysler deal

Jerry White
5 February 2018

Evidence is mounting that former United Auto Workers Vice President Norwood Jewell was deeply involved in the UAW-Fiat Chrysler bribery scheme when he led the union's negotiations for a new labor agreement in 2015. The new revelations bolster the contention of rank-and-file workers that the current contract for 41,000 FCA workers is fraudulent and should be declared null and void.

Although Jewell has not yet been indicted, his name has repeatedly surfaced in the corruption scandal, which involved Fiat Chrysler executives paying more than \$1.5 million in illegal money and gifts to senior UAW officials to obtain sweetheart deals stripping autoworkers of their wages and rights.

On Tuesday, attorneys for Monica Morgan, the widow of late UAW Vice President General Holiefield—the central figure in the illegal conspiracy—will file a guilty plea agreement at a US District Court in Detroit. Her statement is expected to lead to further indictments, which might include one for Jewell.

In an earlier plea agreement, Alphons Iacobelli, who led Fiat Chrysler's negotiations with the UAW from 2009 to early 2015, admitted he and other FCA executives paid "senior UAW officials" to "obtain benefits, concessions, and advantages for FCA in the negotiation, implementation, and administration" of pro-company agreements. This included funneling illegal payments to charities controlled by Holiefield and Morgan, and one run by Jewell, the Making Our Children Smile Foundation, and paying "salary reimbursements" to UAW officials for no-work jobs at the national training center and a "fraudulent 7 percent administrative fee" as a "political gift" to Holiefield and his successor Jewell.

In addition, Iacobelli said he approved the payment of

\$30,000 in training center funds for a lavish party for UAW officials. On Sunday, the *Detroit News* revealed that the August 2014 party, held at the UAW-Chrysler World Class Manufacturing Academy in Warren, was a "coming-out party" for Jewell, two months after the UAW's top administrative body elected him to lead its Fiat Chrysler department.

The party, unnamed sources told the *News*, included "ultra-premium" liquor and "strolling models who lit labor leaders' cigars." The training funds "covered the \$7,000 cigar purchase and a \$3,000 tab for wine in bottles with custom labels that featured Jewell's name, sources told the *News*."

The newspaper previously reported that Jewell also received a \$2,180 shotgun in August 2015 paid for with training center money. Jewell's administrative assistant Nancy Johnson instructed another UAW official at the training center, UAW Administrative Director Virdell King, to use the training center card to purchase the shotgun. King has already pleaded guilty for her role in the scandal, including using the card to buy herself a \$1,000 pair of Christian Louboutin shoes. Jewell later reportedly reimbursed the money for the gun and additional items purchased on the card, the newspaper reported.

UAW President Dennis Williams has made the ludicrous claim that the bribery scheme had no impact on collective bargaining, and the labor agreements are still valid and legal. To back his assertion, the UAW president has said that Holiefield did not have unilateral control over negotiations, and the deals were sanctioned by the entire leadership, including Williams' predecessor Bob King. This only confirms that the entire UAW leadership is complicit in defrauding those they falsely claim to represent.

Up until this point, however, Williams has at least

suggested that the departure of both Iacobelli and Holiefield before negotiations began for the 2015 contract meant that the current four-year labor agreement is beyond reproach.

Less than a year after the lavish party for Jewell, Williams selected Fiat-Chrysler as the lead company for the union's pattern bargaining with General Motors and Ford. This angered workers since any pattern-setting deal with FCA, the weakest of the Big Three, would result in an inferior contract for workers.

Like his successor, Jewell quickly earned the hatred of rank-and-file workers as he sought to ram through the 2015 contract, which included a precedent-setting plan to impose increased health care costs on workers, maintain the hated two-tier wage and benefit system and 10-hour Alternative Work Schedule, and continue the decade-long pay freeze.

The contract was defeated by a 2-to-1 margin by FCA workers in the first rejection of a UAW-backed national contract in three decades. The slightly refurbished deal was pushed through weeks later through a campaign of lies and intimidation. These methods were repeated at GM and Ford, with the latter accompanied by charges of outright vote rigging.

UAW President Williams' efforts at damage control have been met with hostility and derision by rank-and-file workers. At the factories over the weekend, many workers spoke to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, which is calling for workers to overturn the fraudulent contracts and fight for the restoration of all concessions imposed by the UAW.

FCA workers at the Jeep assembly plants on the eastside of Detroit and Toledo, Ohio expressed agreement with the call for the nullification of the sellout contracts. Several who stopped were temporary part-time employees (TPT), who pay union dues but have no job security. The number of these low-paid, disposable workers was increased due to the 2015 UAW contracts.

One young TPT at the Toledo plant said, "We have no rights or representation. We do as much work as regular employees, but we get lower pay."

A recently hired TPT at the Ford Assembly in Chicago added, "They chew us up and spit us out. I've heard that the TPT situation and keeping us part-time is all because of the contract. It was all about the money for the company and the union."

Another full-time worker in Chicago said, "The contract in 2015 was bogus, especially after what they did at the Dearborn Assembly Plant [where workers charged the UAW with stuffing the ballot in order to get the deal passed by 51 percent nationally]. If the union is getting bribes, the whole thing is crooked."

After the media reported Jewell's shotgun gift and the widening investigation, the UAW announced in November that the former UAW vice president would retire January 1 and would not seek reelection for another four-year term. Amid investigations into joint training centers the UAW runs with GM and Ford, former UAW vice president and GM board member Joe Ashton abruptly resigned last year, and Cindy Estrada, the current UAW VP for GM, who was expected to replace Williams at this year's constitutional convention, has been bypassed.

The *News* reported Sunday that Jewell and his former administrative assistant, Nancy Johnson, have hired prominent, white-collar defense lawyers to defend themselves, amid growing anger from workers over the possibility that their union dues will be used to defend the corrupt UAW officials.

The *News* reported that Jewell has hired Chicago attorney Joseph Duffy, whose client list includes Tony Rezko, a former fundraiser and adviser to Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich. The Democratic governor was impeached in 2008, convicted and sentenced to 14 years in federal prison for soliciting bribes to sell Obama's vacant Illinois senate seat in a scandal that also implicated the Service Employees International Union. Johnson has hired Detroit lawyer Harold Gurewitz, who defended ex-Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, now serving 28 years in prison on corruption charges.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact