

# Labor Notes defends UAW amidst corruption scandal

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Since a federal investigation exposed rampant corruption within the upper echelons of the United Auto Workers (UAW), there has been near silence on the part of the various organizations that compose the pseudo-left in the United States.

This is hardly surprising, since groups such as the International Socialist Organization (ISO), Socialist Alternative, *Jacobin* magazine, *Labor Notes* and others serve as craven apologists for the corrupt US trade union bureaucracy, hailing every new sellout as a stunning victory. At the same time, members of these fake left organizations have found a career path and lucrative salaries through obtaining leading positions in the union apparatus.

The exposure of the UAW as a bribed tool of management confirms the assessment by the *World Socialist Web Site* that the unions are not workers' organizations. On the contrary, they long ago broke any connection with the class struggle and serve as enforcers of management dictates inside the factories.

Nothing can revive these organizations, and class-conscious workers must expose their role and fight for the building of factory committees to assert the will of rank-and-file workers against the dictatorship in the plants overseen by the UAW and the auto bosses.

Last week *Labor Notes* broke its silence on the UAW corruption scandal. It published a piece based on an interview with former UAW Local 1700 President Bill Parker conducted by Joe Richards, a writer and a member of the International Socialist Organization (ISO).

Parker offers no serious analysis of the scandal, which has created an existential crisis for the UAW, an organization that is already widely despised by autoworkers for its collaboration with corporate management and suppression of workers struggles. Instead he offers an apology for the UAW, insisting that the company payoffs amounting into the millions of

dollars between 2009 and 2015 had no impact on contract negotiations.

Among those implicated were the late General Holiefield, UAW vice president for Fiat Chrysler, and his successor Norwood Jewell. Holiefield's widow recently pleaded guilty to hiding hundreds of thousands of dollars paid out to her companies from money siphoned off from the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center (NTC).

In his interview, Parker echoes the lying claim by UAW President Dennis Williams that the bribery of top UAW officials had no impact on contract negotiations because they were based on "pattern agreements," which was accepted by the entire UAW leadership, including Williams' predecessor Bob King.

He writes, "At the national level, I think it largely didn't impact them. The negotiations by and large follow the pattern established at the target company, and in 2011 the UAW picked GM as the pacesetter." He continues, "It would be hard to say there's any direct correlation between the corruption at FCA and the poor wages and benefits in that contract because the same thing occurred at GM and Ford. In the national agreements, the UAW president negotiates the wages and benefits, not the VPs like Holiefield."

The fact that the entire UAW leadership backed contracts, which sanctioned two-tier wages, 10-hour workdays, the expansion of temporary part-time employees and other rollbacks, only underscores the fact that the entire UAW apparatus is rotten to the core.

The payoffs to the UAW bureaucracy have not only taken the form of cash payments and credit card purchases of designer clothes, air travel and luxury hotels for Holiefield & Co. The auto bosses have literally funneled billions to their UAW partners over the last four decades through labor-management training centers and other corporatist schemes, as well as the multibillion-dollar retiree health care trust fund.

Parker asks rhetorically if UAW Vice President Norwood Jewell's role in seeking to ram through the 2015 sellout agreement at Fiat Chrysler was "the result of collusion," concluding, "We may never know."

Parker knows full well that Jewell's charity, Making Our Children Smile Foundation, received illegal training center payments, and that when Jewell was named Holiefield's successor in 2014, FCA executives spent \$30,000 in training funds to throw him a lavish party at the UAW-Chrysler World Class Manufacturing Academy.

A year later, Jewell was trying to ram a sellout contract down the throats of FCA workers at a stormy union meeting at Chrysler Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP), Parker's former plant.

*Labor Notes*, whose conferences draw hundreds of local level union officials, operates as a faction of the US trade union bureaucracy. With lawsuits filed against the UAW increasing, along with demands by rank-and-file workers to declare the current contracts null and void, the union executives and their pseudo-left apologists see the growing signs of a rebellion against the UAW and are running to its defense.

Parker has long played the role of a loyal oppositionist, promoting illusions in the possibility of reforming the UAW, insisting that workers never challenge the authority of this anti-working class organization, let alone break free from its stranglehold.

In his interview, Parker, who was a member of the now defunct New Directions group in the UAW, presents the UAW's corporatist, pro-company orientation as though it was a case of the flu that the union caught in the 1980s.

But the degeneration of the UAW, like other unions throughout the US and internationally, was rooted in fundamental economic changes in the 1980s and 1990s and the failure of these nationally based and pro-capitalist organizations to respond in any progressive way to the global integration of capitalist production. Faced with transnational corporations, which could shift production anywhere in the world, the unions abandoned any resistance to the employers and joined their "own" capitalist class to drive down wages and increase "competitiveness."

New Directions, which shared the nationalist, pro-capitalist orientation of the UAW officialdom, and its political alliance with the Democratic Party, provided no alternative and its leaders were either co-opted into the Solidarity House bureaucracy or faded away after betraying local struggles.

Parker played a key role in allowing the UAW to force

through the 2007 agreement, which first established the hated two-tier wage system and handed control of the retiree health care trust fund to the UAW. After offering tepid opposition to the deal, Parker dropped his opposition after Holiefield held a meeting with the rest of the local leadership and claimed the UAW had obtained "job guarantees" for the Sterling Heights plant. Two years later the value of these bogus promises was revealed when GM and Chrysler declared bankruptcy and the Obama administration axed tens of thousands of jobs and halved the wages of new hires.

Parker pathetically suggests autoworkers pin their hopes on the upcoming UAW constitutional convention. However, he concedes that the convention "is a difficult body to influence."

In opposition to this bankrupt perspective, the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* calls for the formation of rank-and-file factory committees independent of the UAW to serve as the genuine voice of autoworkers. Elected by all factory workers, these committees should demand the overturning of all the contracts negotiated by the UAW and fight for their own demands, including a twenty five percent wage increase, the restoration of cost of living, the abolition of tiers and the hiring of all part-time and temporary workers as full-time.

These committees must forge links with autoworkers in Canada, Mexico and globally to coordinate their struggles with the transnational auto companies. The resurgence of the class struggle poses the necessity of building a powerful political movement of the working class, based on a socialist and internationalist perspective, to put an end class oppression, inequality and war once and for all. We urge workers to subscribe to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* and take up this fight.



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