

Another UAW official indicted in federal corruption probe

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15 March 2018

Federal prosecutors have indicted former United Auto Workers (UAW) official Keith Mickens in relation to the ongoing investigation into corruption in the union. The indictment, released on Tuesday, brings to five the number of UAW and Fiat Chrysler officials charged in relation to the illegal diversion of money from the UAW-Fiat Chrysler National Training Center (NTC) into the pockets of union and management officials.

The original indictment, filed in July 2017, charged Fiat Chrysler (FCA) executives with illegally funneling \$1.5 million in bribes to UAW officials in exchange for company friendly contracts. The sweetheart deals signed by the UAW destroyed long-standing rights of autoworkers, cut wages and benefits, and sharply expanded the number of low-paid temporary workers.

Mickens appears to have been a minor player in the scheme. According to the indictment, Mickens received more than \$6,500 in NTC funds, which he spent on electronics, designer clothes, and golf equipment for himself and other UAW officials. He also used an NTC credit card to buy \$1,000 in luggage from a Detroit store.

At the time of the illegal payments Mickens was an administrative assistant for then UAW Vice President for Fiat Chrysler, General Holiefield. Among the allegations against Mickens was that he and other UAW officials arranged for travel for Monica Morgan, Holiefield's then girlfriend, improperly using NTC funds. Mickens also served as vice president of Leave the Light on Foundation, a phony charity used by Holiefield to launder stolen NTC money.

Earlier indictments in the corruption investigation include Alphons Iacobelli, the top FCA negotiator, and Jerome Durden, an FCA financial analyst who helped cook the books. Both men pleaded guilty. Morgan pleaded guilty to tax related charges for concealing

some \$200,000 in illegal payments she received. Another UAW official, Virdell King, pleaded guilty to the improper use of an NTC credit card to make personal purchases in the tens of thousands of dollars. She also bought expensive gifts for other UAW officials using NTC money, including a \$2,180 shotgun for former UAW Vice President for FCA Norwood Jewell, who retired January 1, 2018.

Jewell ran a personal charity, The Making Our Children Smile Foundation, that federal investigators say was used as a conduit to siphon off money from the NTC to union officials. Up to this point Jewell has escaped indictment.

Other UAW officials are implicated. In Iacobelli's plea deal, three UAW officials are listed as "UAW Official-2, UAW Official-3 and UAW Official-4." The plea agreement refers to a plan by Iacobelli, in collusion with UAW Official 4, to make secret \$50,000 payments to select UAW officers on the eve of the 2015 contract negotiations.

According to a recent report in *Automotive News*, at least seven UAW officials, including President Dennis Williams and UAW Vice President for General Motors Cindy Estrada, allowed the state registration of their private charities to expire in 2016, a year before the federal corruption investigation became public.

According to the indictments, illegal payments, dating back to at least 2010, were for the express purpose of influencing contract negotiations by keeping UAW officials, "fat, dumb and happy."

The exposure of rampant corruption in the top echelons of the UAW is hardly a revelation to autoworkers, who face the results of the sordid collaboration between the UAW and management on a daily basis. The bribery scandal is itself the outcome of a long process of corporatist degeneration of the UAW

dating back to the 1980s, when the joint training centers, funded with tens of millions in corporate cash, first evolved as a means of “legal” bribery of union officials.

For its part, the UAW leadership has responded to the corruption investigation by making certain cosmetic changes at the top of the organization. Jewell has been forced out and Joe Ashton, former vice president for GM, has left the company’s board of directors.

Ahead of the UAW constitutional convention this coming June the administration caucus has named Region 5 Director Gary Jones from Missouri as its choice to replace outgoing president, Dennis Williams. The selection of a person outside of Detroit for the top post is unusual. It bypasses Cindy Estrada who had seemed the likely pick. Federal authorities have named Estrada as a person of interest in the corruption investigation.

Gary Jones also ran a personal charity, the 5 Game Changers Charity Fund. This reporter could find no public record of donations and expenditures for the charity, it has no website, and there is no public statement of its goals and purpose.

The indictment of Mickens follows the relatively light treatment handed out to Holiefield’s widow, Monica Morgan. The 13-page indictment of Mickens sheds no further light on the extent of the illegal activities relating to the NTC or the possible involvement of other UAW officials. While the indictment of high-level officers may still happen, the conduct of federal investigators may indicate that the government is winding down its probe.

Concerns are being voiced in the corporate media over the prospect of the destabilization or even collapse of the UAW. The mass rank-and-file opposition to the 2015 contract shook the auto companies and their UAW stooges. Now, there is a widespread sentiment among workers for the nullification of contracts negotiated by the UAW, including the sellout 2015 agreement. There have been protests and talk of strikes among workers and several groups of workers have filed or reopened lawsuits against the UAW and FCA, citing the bribery of union officials.

Heightening concerns, the national contract between the Detroit automakers and the UAW is up for renegotiation in 2019. Further, the statewide strike by West Virginia teachers, who rebelled against the unions

to shut down schools in 55 counties, points to a mood of fighting anger in the working class.

The corruption revealed by the federal investigation into the UAW is not an incidental or accidental feature but expresses the anti-worker essence of the trade unions, which work to suppress the class struggle and block workers from defending their interests. In no case will the prosecution of a few UAW officials lead to the “reform” of this organization.

To wage a struggle in defense of jobs, decent wages, benefits and working conditions, workers must break completely with the UAW and build new fighting organizations. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* calls for the formation of rank-and-file-based factory committees in every workplace to serve as the authentic voice of autoworkers.

These committees must be independent of management and the UAW. They must fight to unify all workers, part-time and full-time, native born and immigrant, in a struggle against management dictatorship in the factories. They should demand the immediate nullification of all the contracts signed by the UAW, an immediate 30 percent rise in wages and the restoration of COLA, the abolition of tiers, and hiring of all part-time and temporary workers as full-time employees.

What is posed is the waging of uncompromising class struggle in the interests of workers. This means not only a break with the UAW, but a rejection of its whole nationalist and pro-capitalist program. Workers are objectively united throughout the world by a system of capitalist economic relations that draws together workers in even the remotest regions. Autoworkers throughout the world must wage a fight together against the transnational corporations and the entire system based on production for private profit.



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