

UAW secretary-treasurer Gary Casteel will not seek re-election

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Gary Casteel, secretary-treasurer of the United Auto Workers, announced abruptly Monday he plans to retire when his term ends in June instead of seeking re-election. The announcement comes amid the ongoing federal corruption probe into the UAW, in connection with the siphoning off of some \$1.5 million into the pockets of union officials from training centers that it operates jointly with Fiat Chrysler.

Casteel was originally considered as a possible successor to UAW President Dennis Williams, who must retire in June due to age restrictions. Casteel replaced Williams as secretary-treasurer after the June 2014 Constitutional Convention.

Despite being considered for the top union office, Casteel had decided to run again for his current position—the second most powerful post—and cited his desire to remain in Tennessee where he lives with his family, rather than move to Detroit, which is required of the president.

His abrupt decision to retire at the end of his term was explained to the press as a personal decision based on family values. However, no exact details were given.

So far six people have been indicted in relation to the illegal transfer of funds from the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center. In addition to two Fiat Chrysler executives, three senior UAW officials have been indicted: Virdell King, Keith Mickens and Nancy Johnson, the top administrative assistant to former UAW Vice President for Fiat Chrysler Norwood Jewell. Monica Morgan, the widow of General Holiefield, the former UAW Vice President for Fiat Chrysler, was also indicted.

Casteel told *Automotive News* that he is “optimistic as ever about the future” of the UAW, in spite of the corruption probes. “We’ve made great strides in recent

years to balance our budget and reach fiscal stability,” he continued. “Meanwhile, we still have much work to do and I look forward to seeing new successes in organizing.”

It will be difficult to convince anyone that Casteel’s resignation has nothing at all to do with the corruption probe. As secretary-treasurer, Casteel had financial responsibilities that gave him access to and oversight of the UAW books and expenses. In his position, he received regular reports from the joint training centers that the UAW runs with the three Detroit automakers. The financial reports of the training centers are a pivotal part of the corruption probe, with all of the indicted having been found guilty of illegally spending funds from these centers—which are supposed to be used for training workers—on vacations and luxuries.

As the federal probe moves up the chain, there is a possibility that both he and Williams may face investigation and indictment for their role in overseeing the siphoning of training center funds for the personal use of UAW officials in return for pushing through a series of contracts, including the 2015 sellout agreement that kept in place the hated two-tier system and vastly expanded the use of superexploited Temporary Part Time workers (TPTs).

The exposure of rampant corruption in the highest levels of the UAW further underscores the anti-worker character of this organization. All the contracts negotiated as a result of these corrupt arrangements should be declared null and void, raising the need for workers to break with the UAW and form new democratic shop-floor organizations.

For decades the UAW has forced through one concession contract after another attacking wages, health care, work rules and retirement benefits of autoworkers. After the 2008 bailout of the banks and

Wall Street by the Bush and Obama administrations, the Detroit-based auto manufacturers agreed to halve the wages of all new workers hired in and expand the number of TPT workers.

TPT workers do the same labor as older legacy workers, for half the pay and few to no benefits and no promise of full-time work, yet they are required to pay union dues. Many TPT and legacy workers alike have rightfully denounced these conditions. The third-world conditions faced by the TPT workers were brought to the public eye by the death of Jacoby Hennings, a young TPT from the Detroit area who worked two jobs to make ends meet and allegedly shot himself after meeting with union officials at Ford's Woodhaven Stamping Plant on October 20, 2017.

Casteel himself is a career UAW bureaucrat. His father was the chairman of UAW Local 225 in Florence, Alabama before becoming a national negotiator in 1967 and eventually an international representative. The younger Casteel was elected chairman of UAW Region 8 in 2002. Casteel was involved in the UAW's organizing efforts in the southeastern United States, including the debacle at Nissan's Canton, Mississippi plant where workers voted against the UAW by a 2-1 margin.

Casteel's decision to step down amid the growing corruption probe indicates a shake-up in the highest echelons of the UAW. His airy comments about looking forward to the future take place under conditions where concerns are being raised in the corporate media about the stability of the UAW, that has for decades served the auto bosses as a means to suppress the class struggle.

These fears echo the sentiments expressed by David Frederick, an attorney for the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees, arguing in court earlier this year. He declared, "Union security is the tradeoff for no strikes." Without the maintenance of the trade unions by state-mandated fees, he warned, "you can raise an untold specter of labor unrest throughout the country."

No reshuffling of positions at the top of the UAW is capable of transforming this organization into an instrument of class struggle. The UAW is the vehicle of an unaccountable bureaucracy comprised of a small army of officials earning six-figure incomes, including Casteel himself, who netted \$171,318 in 2017 in

salaries and expenses on top of other perks.

The eruption of the UAW corruption scandal follows the rank-and file rebellion by autoworkers against the sellout 2015 contract, in which reports by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* of the UAW's undemocratic suppression workers' "no" votes and opposition to the sellout contract were labeled "fake news" by union officials.

The lesson of the 2015 contract struggle is the urgent necessity for the building of a new leadership and new organizations of working class struggle. As the experience of that struggle as well as the recent experience of teachers in West Virginia and Oklahoma demonstrate, the unions only offer workers the prospect of betrayals and defeats. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* will lend every assistance to those seeking a new way forward to fight.



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