

Prosecutor points to UAW “culture of corruption” as union officials face sentencing

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A top ranking former United Auto Workers official convicted in the ongoing federal corruption investigation into illegal payoffs to the union by Fiat Chrysler is due to be sentenced Wednesday after pleading guilty to his role in the affair.

Keith Mickens has asked the court for lenient treatment, citing enormous pressure by the UAW apparatus to engage in corrupt activities sanctioned by upper echelon union officials. Mickens pleaded guilty to using credit cards supplied by the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center (NTC) in Detroit to make personal purchases in violation of federal labor law banning such activities.

So far seven people, including senior UAW and Chrysler officials, have been convicted in the scheme involving the diversion of upwards of \$9 million in NTC funds to obtain favorable contract terms for Fiat Chrysler in national labor agreements. According to a report in the *Detroit Free Press* published Monday, more individuals could face federal charges soon in the federal investigation that has reached the top of the UAW.

In a sentencing memorandum filed October 31 relating to Mickens’ role, federal prosecutors noted the ongoing investigation has “revealed that there was a culture of corruption in the senior leadership of the United Auto Workers union. Leaders of the UAW viewed the National Training Center as a mechanism to take apparently unlimited and illegal payments from Fiat Chrysler for their own personal benefit, for the benefit of the union itself, and their own lavish entertainment.”

It notes that Mickens, the third highest official in the UAW’s Fiat Chrysler department, “became ensconced in that culture of corruption where acceptance of lavish entertainment and personal freebies, all paid for by the

car company, was the rule rather than the exception.”

Attorneys for another former UAW official, Virdell King, an assistant UAW director in the Fiat Chrysler department, filed a sentencing memorandum October 30 asking for leniency for their client. Her lawyers noted that King, like other staff members, was totally beholden to her UAW superiors and if she failed to toe the line could be “demoted, or worse, terminated from the International, and, if the person wants to keep the union job, sent back to the plants.” King is due to be sentenced November 13.

What worse fate could there be for a UAW official, than losing their cushy union position, with its six-figure salary and perks, and being sent back to work in an auto factory, where decades of union-management collaboration have created intolerable conditions?

The sentencing memo goes on to implicate Norwood Jewell, former UAW vice president for Fiat Chrysler, the successor of the late General Holiefield, asserting that both men asked their client to make illegal purchases using NTC funds. Jewell took early retirement from his post last January but has not been charged in the case. Jewell oversaw UAW negotiations in 2015 that resulted in a sellout contract initially voted down by Fiat Chrysler workers by a margin of 2-1.

A former top aide to Jewell, Nancy Johnson, has also pleaded guilty in the corruption case, admitting to using a NTC credit card to charge thousands in illegal personal purchases, including designer shoes, first class flights to California and limousine rides. She has agreed to cooperate in the federal investigation and faces a maximum of 18 months in prison when she is sentenced November 19.

Johnson named former UAW President Dennis Williams as a party to the corruption in the plea agreement she made with federal prosecutors last

summer. According to Johnson, Williams told lower level union officials to use money funneled through training centers funded by Ford, General Motors and Fiat Chrysler to pay for union expenses, including entertainment and travel. Such payments are barred under federal laws relating to the prohibition of company unions.

Currently the UAW is building a luxury “cottage” for Williams at its Black Lake resort in the northern lower peninsula of Michigan. The residence will be 1,885 square feet and have 2 ½ baths, cherry cabinets with a “chocolate glaze finish” and walls covered with “white cedar shiplap.”

Delegates to the 37th Constitutional Convention in Detroit held in June designated the cabin for the use of Williams. The UAW would pay any costs associated with his stays.

UAW President Gary Jones, who replaced Williams in June, is being investigated in connection with some \$1 million in expenses related to stays at luxury resorts in Palm Springs, California by union officials. According to Johnson’s plea deal, the UAW used union funds in 2014-2016 for “extravagant meals, premium liquor, multi-month stays at condominiums, multiple rounds of golf, for little, if any union business or labor-management purposes.” Jones was in charge of union activities in California during that period as director of Region 5.

The UAW has absurdly claimed that the bribery of top UAW officials involved in the 2015 contract negotiations and earlier talks going back to a least 2010 had no impact on labor agreements. In fact, the bribery revelations are but the tip of the iceberg in the incestuous relations between the UAW and the auto companies involving the joint training centers and a web of joint programs that have wedded the interests of the union to those of management, in the process completely separating the UAW from any connection to the defense of workers’ interests.

The joint training centers have evolved as a conduit for the funneling of billions of dollars into the coffers of the UAW since the 1980s. In the process the UAW has been transformed into an arm of corporate management, enforcing an unending series of concession contracts dictated by the auto companies.

All of the corrupt contracts signed by the UAW should be declared null and void. The continuing series

of revelations underscore the necessity for workers to organize independently from the UAW to defend their interests. The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* urge workers to contact us for information and assistance in the construction of rank-and-file workplace and factory committees to take up the defense of their rights. These committees must unite workers in auto, steel, transportation, logistics, communications and education in the US and internationally in a common fight against the corporations. They must be based on a program of class struggle, recognizing that workers have distinct and independent interests from the capitalist owners and the two corporate-controlled parties, the Democrats and Republicans.



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