

“Think of how many lives and families were ruined”

Autoworkers react to new UAW corruption charges

Marcus Day
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On Monday, federal prosecutors in Detroit charged former United Auto Workers Vice President Norwood Jewell with conspiring to violate the Labor Management Relations Act in connection with the sprawling investigation into the bribing of UAW officials by Fiat Chrysler (FCA) executives. To date, four other UAW officials and three company executives, including the former head of labor relations, have pleaded guilty in the corruption scandal.

The charges are the latest in a multi-year investigation into illegal payments funneled by corporate executives to union officials for the purpose of securing “company-friendly agreements,” i.e., ramming through concessions contracts over rank-and-file opposition. Jewell headed the UAW Chrysler Department from 2014 to 2016 and was the chief union negotiator for the 2015 national contract. He is the highest-level UAW official to have been charged thus far.

Workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* on Monday expressed bitterness, disgust and outrage. The indictment of Jewell confirmed their long-held suspicions about the corruption of UAW officials and increased their determination to reverse the losses imposed over many years by the union.

A worker for Chrysler’s Mopar parts department in Georgia told the *Autoworker Newsletter* that the 2015 contracts “should be considered null and void.” He added, “There is no way they can keep defending them now.

“Think of how many lives and families were ruined behind those unethical negotiations! We should wildcat just off of this. I wish there was some type of mass

walkout.

“I knew this day was coming sooner or later. It is a slap in the face of countless members from the early years who gave their lives for the betterment of workers.”

“Norwood Jewell looked us in the face and ferociously defended that the contract was negotiated in good faith,” he continued. “We all know now that this was a lie. The UAW and their duplicitous nature are on borrowed time! Workers all over the world are at our wits end!”

A worker at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in Michigan wrote in an email: “I think Jewell should have gone to jail and every single person that was involved.”

A worker at FCA’s Belvidere Assembly Plant in northern Illinois said that workers “want our money that we were robbed of, especially since the former UAW president [Dennis Williams] has not been charged and sits in his non-union-built Black Lake home with his expensive whiskeys. We wonder why he isn’t being held accountable for it happening under his watch.”

Last month, FCA announced the elimination of an entire shift at the Belvidere plant and the layoff of nearly 1,400 workers, about which the UAW has remained criminally silent. The layoffs will have a domino effect on jobs at parts suppliers and other dependent industries throughout the economically depressed Rockford area.

The worker said he thought the UAW had known about the job cuts in advance. “It’s all about money, corporate profits and taking care of the shareholders at the expense of the workers. It’s a contract year, so

yeah, they play these games with us. We at BAP get this every contract year, where they'll dangle a car coming to us if they get what they want. We get a short-lived job security guarantee while workers take concessions."

Speaking of the coming contract negotiations, he said, "Tier two employees want the same pay as tier one, the same 401k and to be included in the pension... A majority of us want the same things. We also want COLA [cost-of-living raises] back."

Jewell's indictment has implications far beyond just the 2015 Fiat Chrysler contract. As a retiree noted to the WSWs, "Chrysler was the lead in the 2015 negotiations. So GM and Ford followed what they negotiated. It's called pattern bargaining. The entire UAW Big 3 was affected."

Kathy, a contract worker at GM, said, "I had a feeling he was going to be indicted. It was just a question of when. It is past time. It was very strange in 2015 when they started the negotiations at Chrysler, even though it was the weakest one."

"At our job, we don't have a pension or retirement benefits. They [the UAW] just tell us 'be happy you have a job.' The UAW says 'the UAW and GM are one.' They don't include the workers in that."

Referring to the call by the WSWs for workers to form rank-and-file organizations independent of the unions, she concluded, "We need to get rank-and-file committees going now."

"I'm waiting for the day they all get caught," said a former Ford worker, one of many to suffer harassment and abuse at the Chicago Assembly Plant. "They are ruining workers lives!! I feel severely stripped after toiling so hard for Ford Motor Company."

It is not only autoworkers who have suffered due to the UAW's corruption and treachery. Jewell oversaw the negotiation of sellout agreements at agriculture equipment manufacturer John Deere in 2015 and at heavy equipment maker Caterpillar in 2017.

"The government and union have sold out the worker," said a veteran worker at Caterpillar's soon-to-close plant in Aurora, Illinois. The contract forced through by Jewell and the UAW sanctioned the closure of the Aurora plant and the layoff of approximately 800 workers.

"There were over 6,000 people working here in the late 1970s. Now there's about 150. By end of year it

will be closed."

"Big business works hand in hand with government, along with unions," he continued. "If he is guilty, he needs to go to prison, and employees should get pay raises, better health care, pay less on premiums. Take away everything he has and give it to Salvation Army."

Angela, a veteran autoworker at FCA's Kokomo Transmission plants and a member of the Steering Committee of Rank-and-File Committees, told the WSWs: "I met this guy in 2015. I'm confident he DID get rewarded handsomely to sell us that contract. He was abrasive, rude, arrogant and infuriating!!! I hope they bury him under the jail cell, find all of his assets and liquidate them!! Of course it was FCA that paid the bribe... I wonder how that was distributed amongst the UAW bosses?"

"What [UAW President] Gary Jones said about waging a fight in 2019 is bluster. No matter what the UAW does or does not do, we are going to rely on ourselves. It's the same everywhere. It's capitalism."

"I'm looking forward to the WSWs leadership spelling out for all workers how to stand against this corruption and the specific steps necessary to prevent being victimized by corporate and union greed. When workers unite, we are the most powerful class!"

The WSWs Autoworker Newsletter calls on workers to repudiate the corrupt, pro-company UAW and form their own organizations, rank-and-file committees, to carry out a struggle for workers' interests in the coming contract negotiations. Learn more about how to join this effort by emailing us today at autoworkers@wsws.org.



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