

# Autoworkers react to slap-on-the wrist sentencing of former UAW VP

Shannon Jones  
14 August 2019

The slap-on-the-wrist sentence handed down to former United Auto Workers Vice President Norwood Jewell last week has evoked an outpouring of outrage and disgust among readers of the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*.

A federal judge in Detroit sentenced Jewell, who headed the 2015 UAW-Fiat Chrysler negotiations, to a 15-month prison sentence, while imposing no fines or court costs. The judge recommended that Jewell serve the time at the minimum-security federal prison in Morgantown, West Virginia, one of several commonly referred to as “Club Fed.” He is not required to report until January.

To date four high-level UAW officials have been convicted of accepting illegal payments from Fiat Chrysler in exchange for imposing contract terms favorable to management. Jewell admitted to receiving nearly \$100,000 in illegal payments including money for lavish parties, premium liquor and stays at a luxury villa in Palm Springs, California.

The sellout contracts imposed by the UAW have devastated the lives of autoworkers, in particular temporary part-time workers, who pay union dues but have few if any benefits and job protections.

Jewell’s light sentence is all the more remarkable given that he has so far refused to cooperate with federal investigators. Former UAW President Dennis Williams has been implicated in the scandal, but has not yet been indicted. Cindy Estrada, who currently heads the UAW Fiat Chrysler department, is also a person of interest in the investigation.

The UAW is keeping workers in the dark with the contract expiration date for more than 150,000 US autoworkers employed by the Detroit car manufacturers approaching. Since contract talks began in July there has been a complete information blackout.

One longtime reader of the *WWSWS Newsletter* wrote, “The news about the feather-light sentence to the rogue who headed the union is hardly surprising: mobsters do not judge one another for deeds common to every level of mobsterhood, whether private or sworn in on a bible.

“Prison is not for them, it is for exploited workers who asserted resistance to the crimes committed against them...

“Replacing us with robots is hardly a gain to corporate owners because robots don’t buy cars or anything else that corporate heads can accumulate by way of riches, and their hired and bribed lackeys will have no reason to think they are better off than the workers they betrayed. But there’s an intractable truth: we can live without them, but they can’t live without us. Never forget that truth.”

A Ford worker in Ohio said, “As a dues paying member of the UAW I feel this is a travesty of justice. The membership has been sold out in prior years and it will continue. I just want to retire with the meager pension that I will get and be done with all the nepotism, secret deals, and unfairness that has been put on the hard working folks on the plant floor.”

To date the federal investigation has demonstrated that Fiat Chrysler executives siphoned off more than \$1 million from the UAW-Chrysler National Training Center to obtain favorable contract terms, or, as one FCA executive put it, keep UAW officials “fat, dumb and happy.”

FCA is currently in talks with federal authorities over the illegal payments that would involve five years of federal oversight and a \$50 million fine.

One FCA worker commented, “How come stealing\$ from people is just like a petty crime.”

Referring to Jewell, the worker added, “He should be

stripped of his pension and forced to pay the \$ back. When all this is said and done he's going to look back and laugh. Others that follow him need to see that crime doesn't pay."

In fact, the UAW covered \$213,000 in Jewell's legal fees last year and his two sons continue to be employed by the UAW International at its misnamed Solidarity House headquarters in Detroit, making over \$120,000 each.

A worker at farm equipment maker John Deere wrote, "Better take care of ALL WHO PAY DUES THROUGH THE BIG 3 AND DEERE!!!!!!"

Jewell was in charge of negotiations with Deere in 2015. He helped ram through a rotten sellout agreement covering 11,000 Deere workers without providing any details before the vote except for the typical "highlights" document that covered up concessions negotiated by the UAW. Many workers disputed the vote totals and some suggested the vote had been rigged.

The Deere worker continued, "We are all sure we have all been sold out by UAW leadership!! You have members in Region 4 who can't make 50,000 a year while the company makes BILLIONS!!!!"

FCA recently announced the layoff of the second shift at its Belvidere Assembly Plant in Illinois. Some 1,400 workers have been laid off since early May and are facing the gut-wrenching choice between moving hundreds of miles to other FCA facilities or facing possible permanent layoff. These workers have been abandoned by the UAW in the midst of the hype about the building of a new FCA plant in Detroit.

An FCA Belvidere worker wrote, "It's a shame, they [should] get sent to prison, every last one of those thieving scumbags... PRISON....for bribery and theft..and they get to keep their pensions....I hope the rank and file rebels against this, every one of the people that negotiated the SELLOUT 2015 contract has been indicted....that contract should be null and void."

Some 1,500 workers at the FCA Windsor Assembly Plant in Canada, members of Unifor, are also facing an impending layoff at the facility that builds the Chrysler Pacifica and Dodge Grand Caravan. Meanwhile, 270 workers at parts supplier NemaK in Windsor just learned their plant will close next year after Unifor signed a four-year wage freeze it claimed would preserve jobs.

Autoworkers in Canada have been closely following the unfolding UAW corruption scandal. A number of workers have noted the fact that a leading figure in the corruption scandal, Alphons Iacobelli, after leaving FCA headed negotiations between General Motors and Unifor in 2016.

An autoworker from Windsor wrote to the WSWS, "It's big money people that get away with stuff like this. If it was any Joe blow on the street or maybe even one of the auto workers that would have done this they would have been in a high-security prison in regular population in the pen ... they might as well just give him another ticket to Palm Springs. What a joke. How long is it going to take so we all lose our jobs to bureaucratic b\*\*\*\*\* idiots like this..."

The exposure of a few of the more egregious crimes of UAW officials should not obscure the fact that the whole institution is rotten. The UAW corruption scandal is not a case of a few "bad apples" but lifts the lid on an incestuous relationship between union and management that has developed over decades. Far from bargaining on behalf of workers, UAW negotiations are centered on defending the fat salaries and lavish perks of the union apparatus. This is true for all the nationalist and pro-capitalist unions around the world.

It again underscores the importance of the call by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* for the formation of workplace and factory committees as the genuine voice of workers not bought or beholden to management or the corrupt unions. These committees must reach out to autoworkers internationally in order to develop a globally coordinated response by workers to the relentless attacks on jobs and living standards by the transnational corporations.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**