

Norwood Jewell begins 15-month sentence in minimum-security prison for role in UAW bribery scheme

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Convicted former United Auto Workers vice president Norwood Jewell reported to the minimum-security Federal Correctional Institution at Oxford, Wisconsin on Tuesday to serve out his 15-month sentence.

US District Judge Paul Borman sentenced Jewell to prison after he pleaded guilty last April to conspiracy charges stemming from his role in a million-dollar bribery scheme at Fiat Chrysler (FCA). The federal corruption probe has since engulfed large portions of the union's top leadership. So far, the federal investigation probe into the UAW has resulted in the conviction of 11 individuals and charges filed against 13 total. The last two presidents of the union, Gary Jones and Dennis Williams, have also been implicated, as well as current interim president and self-proclaimed "reformer" Rory Gamble.

Fiat Chrysler funneled \$1 million in bribes to UAW officials in exchange for major concessions. Union bureaucrats were issued credits cards through the joint union-FCA National Training Center in order, in the words of one company official, to keep them "fat, dumb and happy." Jewell himself admitted to accepting tens of thousands of dollars worth of bribes.

Jewell also pleaded guilty to the misappropriation of about \$100,000 worth of union funds for his own personal use, including stays at a luxury villa in Palm Springs, California, high-end liquor and extravagant meals.

Jewell's sentence amounts to little more than a slap on the wrist. In addition to the relatively short prison sentence, he was not required to pay fines or court costs. Judge Borman had originally accepted the request of Jewell's attorney Michael Manley that he

serve his prison term in the minimum security Federal Correction Institution in Morgantown, West Virginia, nicknamed "Club Fed" because it houses many wealthy white-collar criminals, including businesspeople and politicians, in a campus described as "college-like" with amenities ranging from a movie theater to a bocce ball court.

In the end, Jewell's prison assignment was moved from "Club Fed" to "the University," as the Oxford facility is sarcastically known. Inmates at Oxford stay in their own private cabins, rather than overcrowded cellblocks more typical of the brutal American prison system, which are spread out over the sprawling 600-acre campus that has been described as "serene" by the *Chicago Tribune*.

Other amenities, including culinary classes, a walking track and recreation center, give the impression that it is more of a retreat than a prison, where upper middle class and elite inmates are sent to ride out sentences in comfort to prove that they have "done their time." Notable past prisoners at the facility include former Illinois Governor George Ryan and US President Trump's former campaign adviser George Papadopoulos.

"It's like a hotel in there," one local resident told the *Tribune* in 2007. "It's clean and comfortable and quite quiet."

For autoworkers, whose dues were stolen and who have suffered under the sellout contracts engineered by the UAW, Jewell's lenient sentence adds insult to injury. The deals, which were forced through with the aid of bribes, not only led to wage cuts, layoffs and maintaining the two-tier pay system. They also paved the way for the expansion of a de-facto third tier of

hyper-exploited temporary workers who perform the same work for far lower wages, and who pay union dues but have virtually no contractual rights.

On the basis of its high utilization of temps, Fiat Chrysler has the lowest all-in hourly labor costs of the Detroit-based automakers, at \$55 per hour. The particularly cozy relationship between Fiat Chrysler and the UAW prompted General Motors to file suit late last year, alleging that the UAW was a “FCA-controlled enterprise.”

However, all of the automakers have been able to rely on the union to help them force through cuts. Last year, the UAW shut down the national strike at General Motors and rammed through a contract that ratified the closure of four facilities and provided the company with a blank check to hire temps, with only a fig-leaf “pathway” to regular employment that will be unattainable for most.

“Why is it [that] someone in a poor neighborhood gets harsh sentences for stealing a loaf of bread, or a mother gets 15 years [in jail] for stealing a gallon of milk for her baby, but a politician or top union official can steal \$100,000 or more and lie about it?” one autoworker said. “Then the international union wasted \$2 million defending him only for him to plead guilty and get 15 months in jail. And you wonder why people don’t trust our leaders.”

“Money talks loudly in the white-collar world,” said another.

During the trial, Manley attempted to paint Jewell as an honest but naive figure caught up in a culture of corruption in the union’s FCA department, after being transferred from the General Motors department, which he briefly ran. This dovetailed with the UAW’s claims at the time that the corruption was limited entirely to FCA, a claim which later exploded after another former union Vice President for GM Joe Ashton was indicted on similar charges. But even before his indictment, Jewell had earned the enmity of autoworkers, many of whom jeered at Jewell during meetings for the 2015 contract ratification votes.

Jewell not only helped to force through sellouts in his capacity during his earlier tenures as the union’s Vice President for GM and as Director of Region 1-C. Jewell, a political kingmaker in Flint, Michigan, also endorsed the privatization scheme that led directly to the Flint water crisis by switching the industrial city’s

water supply to the polluted Flint River.

The revelation of widespread corruption in the UAW only confirms what autoworkers have known all along – that the UAW is on the side of the companies, not the workers. From a legal standpoint, all of the UAW contracts negotiated over the last decade should be considered null and void because they were “negotiated” by bargainers who were being paid off by the other side.

The near-immediate exposure of union “reformer” Rory Gamble, only months after assuming his post as interim president after Gary Jones was forced into retirement, demonstrates that the UAW cannot be reformed. The corruption itself is the outcome, not the cause, of the class hostility of the union as a whole to the workers which it claims to represent – a hostility that is shared by unions throughout the world, from Unifor in Canada to the CTM in Mexico and IG Metall in Germany, which have all worked with the companies to destroy jobs and force through cuts.

To organize a fightback against cuts and the union’s treachery, autoworkers must form new organizations, rank-and-file committees, to take the initiative out of the hands of the unions and establish lines of communication with their class brothers and sisters throughout the world. These committees, unlike the UAW, will not begin with what the global auto companies will allow, but the social needs of the working class.

To join the fight to build rank-and-file committees, contact us today.



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