

Former UAW presidents Jones and Williams report to prison for embezzling millions in workers' dues money

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Former UAW presidents Gary Jones and Dennis Williams reported to federal prisons this week to begin their sentences after being convicted in connection with the UAW corruption scandal. Both Jones and Williams received token jail time for their parts in funneling millions of dollars in members' dues money into the pockets of themselves and other corrupt UAW officials.

Jones reported to the federal prison in El Reno, Oklahoma to begin serving a 28-month sentence. Jones was convicted of embezzling up to \$1.5 million in UAW funds, much of it spent on luxury items such as steak dinners and stays at expensive spas in Palm Springs, California.

Williams will serve his 21-month sentence in Tucson, Arizona. He held the office of UAW president from 2014-2018, during which time he and others embezzled more than \$1 million in UAW funds, enjoying months-long stays at a luxury Palm Springs villa, golf equipment, premium liquor and lavish meals. An August 2019 raid on William's home found "piles of cash" stashed inside.

The federal prison in El Reno where Jones is serving his time is a medium-security facility with a satellite camp for minimum-security male prisoners. The minimum-security facility offers many amenities including "areas for both indoor and outdoor activities, which include field games, court games, tabletop games, individual events, arts and crafts, team sports, space for music enthusiasts, and television. Basketball, flag football, soccer, and Frisbee are all popular sports leagues," according to the InmateAID website.

The Tucson federal prison where Williams is being held also has a minimum-security satellite camp with similar amenities.

Federal prosecutors showed enormous leniency to Jones and Williams, considering the gravity of their crimes. Both men used their positions to divert millions of dollars in dues money into their own pockets from the dues taken from the paychecks of autoworkers. The 21-month and 28-month sentences handed down to Williams and Jones compare with the savage sentences typically handed out to poor and working class defendants for relatively minor crimes. The case of Fair Wayne Bryant, jailed for life in Louisiana's notorious Angola State Penitentiary for stealing a pair of hedge clippers, is only one of thousands of such examples.

The removal of a few corrupt officials from the UAW leadership has done nothing to "reform" the organization, which remains totally hostile to the interests of workers. Since the beginning of this year alone, the UAW has rammed through one pro-company sellout after another, including at Columbia University, parts maker Nexteer in Saginaw, Michigan and Volvo Trucks in Virginia. At auto parts maker Dana, the UAW has refused to call a strike despite the massive rejection by workers of the company's contract offer.

A total of 12 UAW officials have so far been convicted in the federal corruption investigation. Three former Fiat Chrysler/Stellantis executives also received jail terms for illegal payments to UAW officers aimed at obtaining favorable contract terms, which go back to at least 2009. During that time, the UAW signed contracts that handed over billions in cost savings to the auto companies at the expense of autoworkers' wages, jobs, benefits and working conditions.

This included the expansion of the hated multi-tier wage scales, a massive increase in super-exploited temporary workers and substandard pay raises. But

despite the exposure of the bribery scheme, none of the concessionary contracts signed by the UAW with the auto companies have been invalidated and not one penny has been returned to autoworkers.

A consent decree signed by the UAW in December 2020 established an independent monitor to oversee the union and a few other reforms, including a referendum on the direct membership election of international officers in place of the current delegate system.

The government chose high-profile former bank regulator Neil Barofsky as the independent monitor, an indication that the Biden administration sees the matter of restoring a semblance of credibility to the UAW with some seriousness. The erosion of that credibility, amid signs that workers are breaking free from the stranglehold of these corrupt, corporatist institutions, is viewed with alarm by the ruling class.

A membership vote on an amendment to the UAW constitution providing for direct election of officers will be held starting October 12, with ballots due by November 12. Earlier this week, federal prosecutors and the UAW asked a federal judge that the conclusion of the referendum be pushed back two weeks to November 29, claiming this would provide more time for the contractor which is counting mail-in ballots for 1 million UAW members and retirees.

In August, the *Detroit News* reported that the federal investigation into the UAW was continuing, despite the earlier consent decree. The *News* reported that federal prosecutors asked that search warrants and related documents from earlier in its investigation be made available to Barofsky, who was planning to meet with Jones. It was speculated Jones might be trying to obtain leniency by providing evidence against other UAW officers.

Among those cited by the *News* as potential targets were UAW Vice President for Stellantis Cindy Estrada and former UAW Vice President for Ford Jimmy Settles. Private charities run by Settles and Estrada had earlier drawn federal scrutiny. A phony charity run by late UAW Vice President General Holiefield had been used to launder bribes from Fiat Chrysler.

As grotesque as the corruption of Williams, Jones and fellow conspirators is, their removal does nothing to change the character of the UAW, which has long ceased to function as a workers' organization.

In return for imposing concessionary contracts and

suppressing strikes in the 1980s, the companies established a network of incestuous relations with the auto union, including joint committees, joint programs and training centers, funded with billions of dollars in corporate cash. According to court documents between 2003 and 2019 Fiat Chrysler alone handed the UAW \$300 million through the jointly operated National Training Center.

Even as the number of dues paying UAW members plummeted due to plant closures, carried out with the blessing of Solidarity House, the assets of the UAW have ballooned due to huge corporate subsidies. Over the years, the UAW amended the union constitution to allow the limitless diversion of hundreds of millions from the strike fund to pay the salaries and perks of UAW officers.

Workers must build new organizations independent of the pro-company UAW. The *World Socialist Web Site* has called for the formation of rank-and-file committees, democratically run by workers themselves, to take over the functions long abandoned by the unions.

A network of these committees has already been established at auto plants, Amazon warehouses, schools and other workplaces in the US and internationally. During the recent Volvo strike in Virginia, the Volvo Workers' Rank-and-File-Committee played a prominent role in mobilizing workers to defeat a series of sellout contracts brought back by the UAW. Dana auto parts workers recently defeated a UAW-sponsored sellout aided by the work of the Dana Workers' Rank and File Committee.

To join or help build a rank and file committee at your workplace, contact autoworkers@wsws.org today.



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