

Corruption scandal engulfs Philadelphia IBEW union

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On Monday December 19, the political director of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 98 in Philadelphia, Marita Crawford, pleaded guilty to four counts of wire fraud which, under US federal law, is a felony. Crawford faces up to 20 years in prison at sentencing in April.

Crawford was a close associate of prominent IBEW official John Dougherty, also known as “Johnny Doc,” who, along with four other union officials, is facing charges related to the embezzlement of union dues. In total, Local 98 officials are suspected to have stolen over \$600,000 from members.

Crawford admitted using union funds on herself, including to pay for expensive trips and birthday dinners. Crawford was also caught on tape saying, “You know the way we roll,” in reference to buying expensive concert ticket seats at Taylor Swift, Bette Midler, and Billy Joel concerts. Other purchases by her include \$4,500 in gift cards, hundreds of dollars on expensive makeup, and over \$1,000 in personal meals and catering.

In spite of this record of swindling from her members, her lawyer, Fortunato Perri, has attempted to suggest that Crawford is a labor hero. “She has been a champion of the labor movement for the past several years,” Perri implausibly suggested. “[S]o she hopes to continue in her professional career moving forward.”

As part of her plea agreement, Crawford will be barred from being a union official for 13 years, as per US Department of Labor rules, and must pay \$12,000 in restitution directly to Local 98.

The more information that comes to light, the more it becomes clear that the IBEW is an organization saturated in corruption, in which raiding members’ dues is considered a “perk” of plum bureaucratic jobs. Crawford’s mentor, “Doc” Dougherty, also kept

himself busy using the union’s money for personal use. No purchase was too mundane. He even used union funds to buy daily groceries, including cereal, toiletries, and baby products, among other various items.

This petty raiding of union funds is just icing on the cake for a figure like Dougherty, who, as the union’s Business Manager, made a net salary of \$234,731 a year with another \$134,123 in benefits and compensation, bringing his gross salary to \$368,854, the most of all Local 98 employees. Crawford has a base salary of \$150,865 along with \$16,097 in benefits, bringing her total compensation to \$166,962. In total, the IBEW Local 98 has 29 high-ranking officials from “office workers” up to the Business Manager position who make over \$100,000 a year. These 29 officials make a combined total of \$4,607,048 per year.

Dougherty has chosen not to enter into any plea agreement and has denied any wrongdoing on the charges of embezzlement. He is appealing a separate conviction on other charges, including violent threats and bribing public officials, namely Bobby Henon, a former Democratic Party city council member who was put on union payroll for \$70,000 per year. Dougherty and his nephew, Gregory Fiocca, are accused of throwing a contractor on a desk and threatening to “break his f*** face” if Fiocca was not paid for a job he barely showed up for. In Philadelphia, the line between organized labor and organized crime is vanishingly thin.

Another IBEW official who decided to plead guilty was Niko Rodriguez. Rodriguez used union money on around \$4,000 worth of items on more than 33 trips to stores, from retail to home improvement stores. His plea only admits that he used around \$1,080 of the union’s money, but he will pay back \$13,500.

Rodriguez was among several low-level Local 98

members whom Dougherty used as errand boys for purchases. It turns out these “low-level” officials are often family members of “high-level” officials. Dougherty’s previously mentioned nephew and Crawford’s son were among these dubious union employees. In one example of union dues “hard at work” by this method, Dougherty used one of these servants to power wash the sidewalk outside his home and water his tomatoes.

The scandal engulfing the IBEW in Philadelphia is not a case of a few bad apples. Such corruption is endemic, part and parcel of the misnamed “American labor movement,” as shown by the recent corruption scandal in the UAW, which has seen a dozen former officials jailed. These are not workers’ organizations but profit-driven entities. The amount of money involved is substantial. The national IBEW sits atop assets of over \$575 million, according to data from 2018.

The union apparatus, having raised itself up above the workers it nominally represents, joins hands with the corporations and government in exploiting them. The looting of member dues flows inexorably from this essentially criminal characteristic. So too does the unions’ mortal fear of rank-and-file workers and their hostility to basic democratic rights. It is not an accident that the IBEW, like the UAW, has been exposed for trampling over workers’ rights to vote for leadership and to strike.

In June 2022, the United States Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania released a statement which revealed that they were charging the leaders of Local 98 for having violated workers’ right to vote by intimidating and threatening members during the union’s June 2020 elections, causing challengers to withdraw their candidacies. This intimidation by the bureaucratic apparatus was a success. Every single union officer ran unopposed and was re-elected to the positions they use as personal piggy banks. Dougherty himself engaged in this anti-democratic campaign, according to the office.

But IBEW workers can have no confidence in federally supervised elections. The UAW corruption scandal forced the bureaucracy to submit to federally supervised elections this fall. The UAW, acting in collusion with the federally appointed monitor, did everything to make sure workers did not hear about the

election taking place, in order to prevent workers from learning about rank-and-file socialist candidate Will Lehman. Only 9 percent of all UAW members voted, and a substantial share of this small minority were paid union officials.

The suppression of workers’ democracy is necessary to suppress the class struggle. Notable in this regard is the IBEW’s role in blocking the strike of 120,000 railroaders. In late September, the IBEW achieved a ratification of the rotten contract, crafted by President Biden and widely hated by workers, for its 4,000 members in the industry. There was overwhelming evidence of vote fraud, drawing condemnation from IBEW workers and the Railroad Workers Rank-and-File Committee (RWRFC).

The IBEW was in full support of the Biden administration’s effort to block the rail strike. Politically, like the other unions, it functions as an agency within the Democratic Party. Indeed, while a large portion of union dues go to salaries and “personal expenses” of the union executives such as Dougherty, another and even larger stream is directed by figures like Dougherty to the Democratic Party.

Dougherty is viewed as something of a kingmaker in Philadelphia politics. He promoted current Philadelphia mayor Jim Kenney in his 2015 mayor campaign and was a large reason for his selection by the Democratic Party. In 2017 alone, Local 98 channeled \$6.5 million in union dues to electioneering, almost exclusively to Democrats. It was the single largest independent source of campaign funds in Pennsylvania that year.

Here too, it seems the union officials cannot keep family separate from business. John Dougherty’s own brother, Kevin Dougherty, was promoted by IBEW Local 98 for Pennsylvania Supreme Court. Kevin Dougherty’s victory in 2015 was supported by \$1.5 million in union membership money.



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