

DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

BOX 5 OF 16

FOLDER 22

WORKMENS COMPENSATION
JOHNSON CASE
CORRESPONDENCE

Chrysler Must Pay for Killer's Care

BY HOWARD KOHN
Free Press Staff Writer

Chrysler Corp. has been ordered to help pay for the psychiatric treatment of a former factory worker who killed two foremen and a fellow worker in a Detroit Chrysler plant in 1970.

The Michigan Bureau of Workman's Compensation, in a ruling released Monday, said that the man, James Johnson Jr., must be awarded \$5,000 in back pay and a weekly stipend of \$75 for future care.

The bureau issued the order on the grounds that dangerous working conditions and a racist atmosphere in the Eldon Ave. Axle Plant helped to drive Johnson to shoot and kill the three men.

Johnson was acquitted of a murder charge on the grounds of insanity in a 1971 trial and was ordered to remain in state mental hospitals until doctors find him fit enough to return to society.

Although other workers have previously won disability payments for mental duress suffered in factories, the Johnson ruling goes beyond the past rulings.

"Johnson was a good worker and needed his job," argued Ron Glotta, one of his attorneys. "But the conditions at Chrysler wore him down and drove him mad."

"This landmark decision is a direct indictment of the racism and inhumane working conditions at Chrysler. Chrysler pulled

Please turn to Page 4A, Col. 1

Killer at Chrysler To Get Back Pay

• Continued from Page 1A •

the trigger which resulted in Johnson's insanity and the death of three men."

A CHRYSLER spokesman said the auto company will not comment until it has a chance to review the decision.

In a 28-page decision, John Conley, a state labor referee, ruled that Chrysler had not satisfactorily rebutted Johnson's "charges of radical slurs, job assignments by the foreman based on close personal friendship for (another worker) and dislike of Johnson as an individual and as a Negro because such foreman believed Negroes slower than white men in catching onto instructions."

Johnson, 38, a former plantation sharecropper from Mississippi, is black.

Ernie Fackler, director of the Bureau of Workman's Compensation, said his office had "agonized" over the decision.

"What will probably seem appalling and shocking to most people is that it appears the state is giving cash to a criminal," Fackler explained. "We are not condoning his crimes, which are serious indeed. But we are saying that this man was mentally disabled, in part, due to his job."

Conley cited evidence that Johnson started having nightmares "after being fired (erroneously) while on vacation and injured from falls on the oily floor of the plant and being struck and injured from gears and axles falling from overhead conveyors."

JOHNSON WAS also allegedly told by a white foreman that "you niggers can't catch on to nothing" and to "do this right now, boy, and I mean right now, boy," according to the bureau's ruling.

Johnson was suspended from the Chrysler axle plant on July 15, 1970, after having worked there since 1967, when he refused to unload oven-hot brake shoes without having asbestos gloves.

He returned to the plant an hour later with an M-1 carbine and killed the foreman who had suspended him, another foreman who tried to wrestle the gun away and a fellow worker.

A prominent psychiatrist testified during Johnson's trial 10 months later that Johnson had suffered from "total despair and frustration" typical of workers who feel they have little chance of "upward achievement."

The psychiatrist also said Johnson suffered from the stresses of racism.

LAW OFFICES OF
GLOTTA, ADELMAN, DINGES, TAYLOR, DAVIS AND MIDDLETON, P. C.

FOURTH FLOOR, HARTZ BUILDING / 1529 BROADWAY / DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48226

313/964-1190

January 13, 1975

MICHAEL ADELMAN
HUGH M. DAVIS
ROBERT J. DINGES
RONALD D. GLOTTA
DIANE L. MIDDLETON
H. JOHN TAYLOR

Mr. Kenneth V. Cockrel
Attorney at Law
409 Griswold, 4th. Floor
Detroit, Michigan 48226

RE: James Johnson v. Chrysler Corporation

Dear Mr. Cockrel:

Pursuant to our conversation, enclosed please find a copy of the brief on Appeal of Defendant-Appellant, Chrysler Corporation, and other materials for the above entitled case.

You asked me to respond to the question of an accounting. I will indicate that it is our position that no accounting is required for two reasons: 1) Most important, because there has been substantial compliance with every requirement of the contract and we consider therefore that we have fully complied with it. A part of this factor is of course the general fact that there is in fact no money due and owing at the present time. 2) It is of course our position that your office has committed egregious breaches of contract for which damages are due and owing to us.

We, of course, would be willing to have meetings to clarify the above matters if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

GLOTTA, ADELMAN, DINGES, TAYLOR,
DAVIS, & MIDDLETON, P.C.



Ronald D. Glotta

RDG/ftm

Enclosures

Editor
Free Press

To the Editor:

We are dismayed at your recent editorial regarding the James Johnson Workmen's Compensation decision. While you state that you "struggled" to read the opinion (which may be more a comment on the newspaper's lack of legal training than Mr. Conley's decision), you do not indicate that you have reviewed the record or attended the hearing before Mr. Conley. Even worse, the editorial consciously and blatantly distorts the facts.

The facts are that the shootings which occurred on July 15, 1970 were inextricably tied to a series of actions on the part of Chrysler and its supervisors which were openly racist and bitterly inhumane. James Johnson never had any history of mental illness let alone one dating back 22 years. Chrysler supervision testified that Mr. Johnson was a good worker, missing little time. His job was central to his life and he used it to support his mother and sister. Before working at Chrysler, he had been honorably discharged from the armed services and had no previous history of any mental disease. He received no psychiatric treatment as a child and he received one week of psychiatric consultation while in the service. That is, Chrysler was in no way deceived. With humane, nondiscriminating employment practices, Chrysler would still have four good taxpaying workers at the Eldon plant.

The facts are that three bitter strikes occurred at the Eldon plant in April and May, 1970, all caused by the same racist practices and dangerous working conditions that broke James Johnson, Jr.. The facts are that inspections of the plant by both the UAW and the Michigan Department of Labor disclosed hundreds of violations of basic safety rules. The facts are that Fred Holsey was fired in January 1969 after a strike protesting racist practices by Chrysler management and unsafe working conditions, and it is a fact that Civil Rights Judge, Philip Colista, after extensive testimony and investigation, ruled Holsey's firing a racist act by Chrysler and ordered him reinstated with full back pay which Chrysler has not yet done. Judge Colista also described safety conditions at Eldon as "abominable". This is the situation that James Johnson found himself in in the summer of 1970.

In June, 1970, Mr. Johnson took an authorized vacation. When he returned to work, he discovered that he was fired for taking that same vacation. He was eventually reinstated. This fact was also not rebutted by Chrysler.

The same foreman who fired Mr. Johnson after his vacation frequently called Mr. Johnson "boy" and "nigger". This same foreman did, in fact, bypass Mr. Johnson in June, 1970, for promotion to the position of job setter for openly racist reasons. This fact was not rebutted by Chrysler.

Contrary to the opinion of your editorial writer, the Johnson case is not a unique or isolated instance, nor is it without precedent, as admitted by your editorialist. During the past several years there have been numerous instances of violence in Detroit area plants. A white worker at the Chrysler Jefferson Assembly plant recently shot and killed his foreman after being laid off. Like it or not, working conditions are deteriorating rapidly under increased demands for productivity, just as they did at Eldon in the spring and summer of 1970, and it is inevitable that violence in the plants will increase and worsen as the process continues.

The facts add up to one conclusion. The series of events which occurred in the spring and summer of 1970 precipitated a psychological breakdown on the part of Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson's breakdown was a direct result of the manner in which the Chrysler Corporation has chosen to operate the Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle Plant.

The Free Press editorial shows the same disrespect and hostility to the judicial process as the Nixon administration has shown to the press and the news media. The editorial is attempting to "manipulate" the judicial process by misinforming the public as to the facts and placing extraordinary pressure on the Bureau of Workmen's Compensation to reverse a decision which, even the Free Press admits, is supported by the legal precedent.

Jordan Sims

John Taylor

Fred Holsey

J.C. Thomas

Eldon Workers

Law offices of:

GLOTTA, ADELMAN & DINGES

March 15, 1973

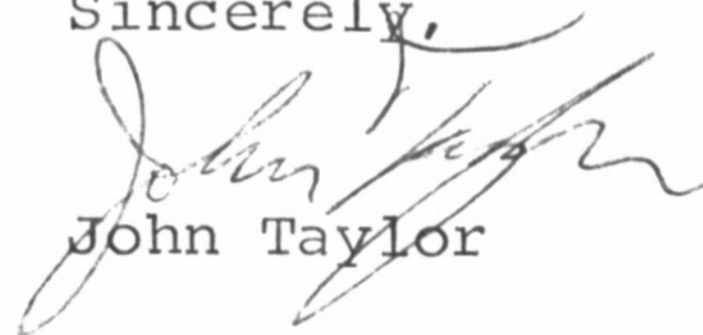
Detroit Free Press
321 W. LaFayette
Detroit, Michigan

Attention: Editor

Dear Editor:

Enclosed is a reply, signed by several individuals, to your editorial of March 12, 1973, regarding the James Johnson Workmen's Compensation case. We ask that this letter be printed in its entirety in your letters to the editor column.

Sincerely,



John Taylor

cc.: Paul Branzberg
Howard Kohn

The
Southern
Poverty
Law
Center

April 19, 1973

Ronald D. Glotta
Glotta, Adelman & Dinges
1529 Broadway, 4th Floor
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Dear Mr. Glotta,

Your donation to the Southern Poverty Law Center has been received with appreciation. For Julian Bond let me thank you, and advise you that you will receive regular reports on cases in progress.

The Center receives many requests from attorneys in all parts of the country for copies of briefs, decrees and the like connected with cases we're involved in. Should you have any need for such materials, please don't hesitate to write to me.

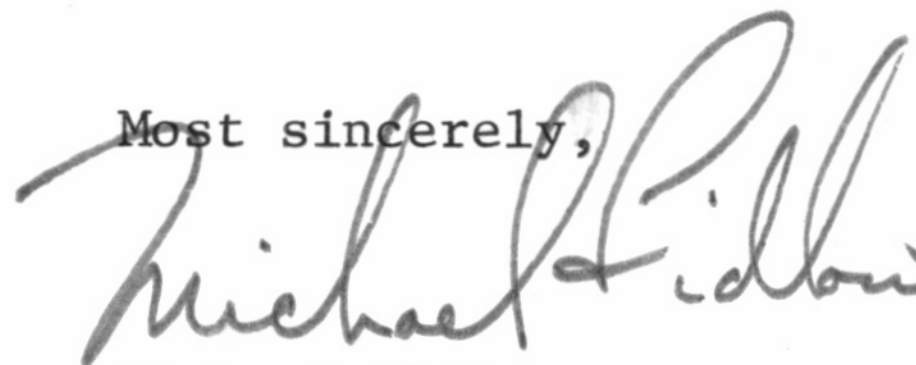
We have also begun publication of a quarterly newspaper which we hope will grow into a well-known clearing house of information on all aspects of poverty law. I am enclosing a copy of the first issue, which was published in March.

We'll appreciate any information regarding your own poverty law cases which you feel may be of interest to our readers. Perhaps you'd even consider contributing an article!

Address any correspondence regarding the newspaper to "Managing Editor, Poverty Law Report," at our offices in Montgomery.

Once again, thank you for your support of our efforts.

Most sincerely,



Michael Fidlow
Executive Director

MF/me

4/26/73

Ron,

Made a copy just in case you have a file
for this somewhere.

Frank

LAW OFFICES OF
GLOTTA, ADELMAN AND DINGES

FOURTH FLOOR, HARTZ BUILDING

1529 BROADWAY

DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48226

April 26, 1973

313/964-1190

RONALD D. GLOTTA
MICHAEL ADELMAN
ROBERT J. DINGES
JOHN TAYLOR
HUGH M. DAVIS

Managing Editor
Poverty Law Report
Washington Building
Montgomery, Alabama 36101

Re: James Johnson -v- Chrysler Corporation

Dear Sir:

This is in answer to a letter written to me by Michael Fidlow of April 19, 1973. Enclosed please find the following information: the decision of James Johnson written by the Hearing Referee here in Michigan and an article that was written concerning this case. Certain corrections have been made if they are not readable you can call me and I will explain them to you. Thank you for your concern.

Sincerely,

GLOTTA, ADELMAN, & DINGES


Ronald D. Glotta

RDG/ft

Enclosures

March 15, 1973

Editor
Free Press

To the Editor:

We are dismayed at your recent editorial regarding the James Johnson Workmen's Compensation decision. While you state that you "struggled" to read the opinion (which may be more a comment on the newspaper's lack of legal training than Mr. Conley's decision), you do not indicate that you have reviewed the record or attended the hearing before Mr. Conley. Even worse, the editorial consciously and blatantly distorts the facts.

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Eldon Workers:

Jordan H. Sims
Jordan Sims, discharged, 5-1-70

John Taylor
John Taylor, discharged, 5-28-70

Fred Holsey
Fred Holsey, discharged 1-29-69

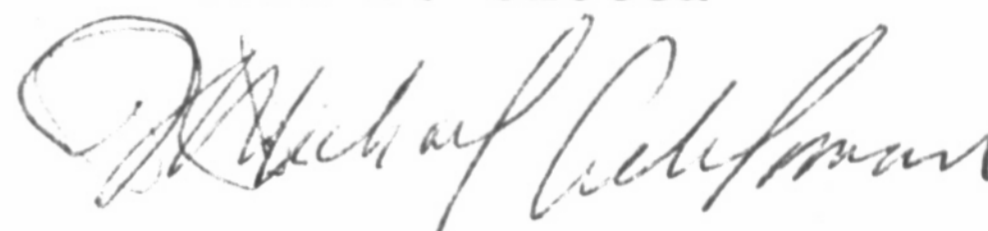
J.C. Thomas

J.C. Thomas, second shift

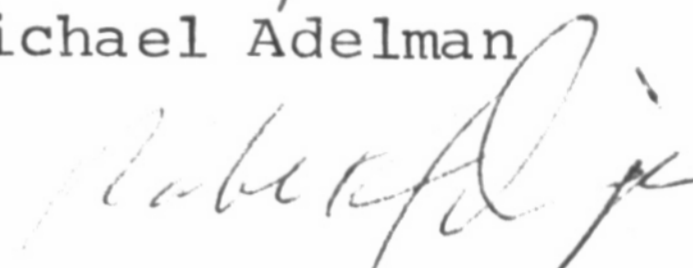
Law Offices of Glotta, Adelman & Dinges



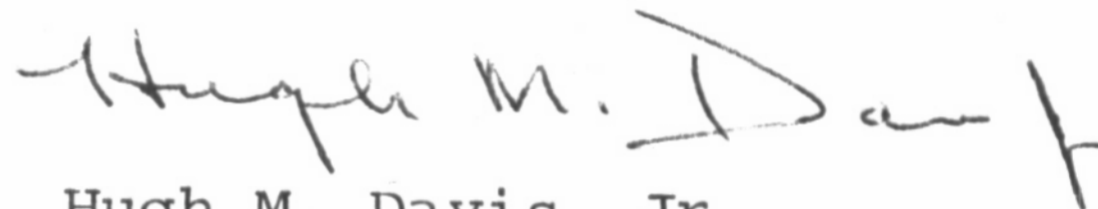
Ronald D. Glotta



Michael Adelman



Robert J. Dinges



Hugh M. Davis, Jr.



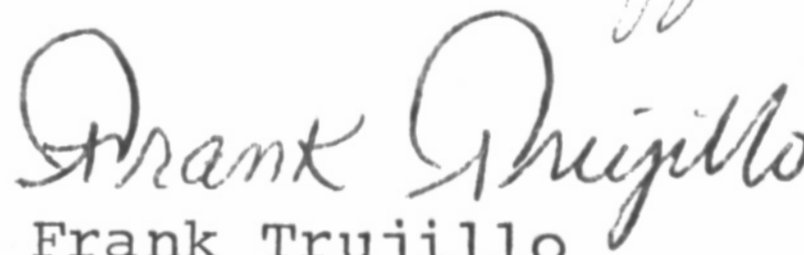
William O. Culpepper



Deborah D. Scrutchions



Theresa DeMaggio



Frank Trujillo

GLOTTA, ADELMAN AND DINGES
1529 BROADWAY - DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48226
Phone 1-313-964-1190

AUG 27 REC'D

M E S S A G E

R E P L Y

TO Rachael Scott

Brownsville, Maryland 21715

DATE August 20, 1973

Enclosed is a copy of the James Johnson decision and clippings (newspaper) on the Chrysler recent strikes.

Sincerely,

GLOTTA, ADELMAN, & DINGES

SIGNED 

Brownsville, Maryland 21715
DATE August 23, 1973

Ron--goddamn good stuff. Looks like Chrysler never changes. I enjoyed Bill Black's stories but am a little confused as to details. I'm hoping to come to Detroit this fall if time and money permit. If not, I'll surely be back in touch with more questions. The Johnson decision was exciting to read, because I recognized from talks with Marcus and Loria as well as you and others. I would be interested to know in what ways the Johnson case goes beyond Carter in precedent setting, because I think it deals with the effects of the ~~basic~~ brutal and amoral structure of American industry. ^{at its most basic level,} Congratulations.

yours,



P.S. enclosed is a copy of a story I wrote for the Atlantic Monthly. It will be a chapter in the book.

SIGNED

LAW OFFICES
GUERRY B. MCNABB
ATTORNEY AT LAW
503 LIBERTY LIFE BUILDING
MUSKEGON, MICHIGAN 49440

TELEPHONE:
(AREA CODE 616)
722-7000

March 6, 1973

Ronald D. Glotta
Attorney at Law
1529 Broadway
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Re: Johnson Case

Dear Ron:

The decision you obtained in the Johnson v. Chrysler compensation case represents a significant milestone in the compensation law. I am pleased for your client and offer my congratulations to you. It will be interesting to learn the outcome of the capital crimes trial against Mr. Johnson.

Sincerely,



Guerry B. McNabb
Attorney at Law

GBM/jf

March 12, 1973

Leonard Woodcock, President
United Automobile Workers
Solidarity House
8000 E. Jefferson Ave.
Detroit, Michigan 48214

Dear Brother Woodcock:

The undersigned, as well as other members of the UAW and community, request to meet with you on Thursday, March 15, 1973, at 10:00 a.m., at Solidarity House, regarding recent developments at the Chrysler Eldon Ave. Gear and Axle Plant. As you know, as a result of the recent workmen's compensation decision in the James Johnson, Jr., case Chrysler has once again been found to operate the Eldon Ave. Gear and Axle plant in not only a racist but in a generally inhumane and dehumanizing manner.

The undersigned were each fired from the Eldon Ave., Gear and Axle plant in January, 1969, and in April and May of 1970. We were fired because we fought the very conditions which Chrysler has chosen to maintain at the Eldon Plant and which lead to the psychotic breakdown of Mr. Johnson and the death of three fellow employees. It is time that our firing and the conditions at Eldon be remedied. The recent Johnson decision is a vindication of the position we took prior to our discharges.

We want to meet with you regarding the upcoming collective bargaining negotiations and the position that no contract be signed with Chrysler until we are reinstated at the Eldon Plant. We will be at Solidarity House on Thursday, March 15, 1973, at 10:00 a.m., and hope to meet with you at that time. We hope this meeting can be the beginning of a new, united commitment to fight the kinds of conditions that the Chrysler Corporation, as well as GM and Ford, have perpetuated in the automobile plants in the United States.

Fraternally,

Jordan U. Sims
John Taylor
Fredrick A. Holsey

MCCROSKEY, LIBNER, REAMON, WILLIAMS, VAN LEUVEN & KLUKOWSKI, P.C.

1440 PECK STREET, POST OFFICE BOX 27 • MUSKEGON, MICHIGAN 49443 • PHONE 726-4861

M E S S A G E

R E P L Y

TO

Dear Ronnie:

DATE

DATE

Congratulations! Even though
you're not speaking to me,
I still want to tell you we are
all proud of you.

Love
&
Kisses,

Pat

BY

SIGNED

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INSTRUCTIONS TO SENDER:

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