# Michigan Ford plant explosion claims third victim

**Jerry White**
**13 February 1999**

A third worker died Friday night from injuries sustained in the explosion at a Ford Motor Company power plant. Warren Blow, 51, of Dearborn Heights, had been in critical condition since the February 1 blast at the company's Rouge complex, just outside of Detroit. Thirteen workers remain hospitalized, eight in critical condition.

Earlier in the day Cody Boatwright, 51, was buried in Sheffield, Alabama. Boatwright, who had worked for 21 years as a high-pressure pipe welder at Ford, died of severe burns February 5 after efforts by hospital personnel at the University of Michigan trauma and burn unit failed to save him.

Last Monday, friends and coworkers buried Donald Harper, a 58-year-old father of six, with 35 years of service as a pipe-fitter at Ford, at a Detroit-area cemetery. Harper was killed instantly when the 60-foot boiler exploded and sent flames, super-heated water and metal shrapnel among the workers laboring on the third floor of the complex's electrical power station.

A state inspector determined February 5 that the explosion was caused by a natural gas buildup in the boiler's firebox. It is unknown, however, why the gas leaked into the boiler, which was reportedly being shut down for annual inspection, or what ignited the fuel.

The eight Ford workers struggling for their lives at hospitals in Detroit, Ann Arbor and Toledo, Ohio are: John Arseneau, 45, of Dearborn; Ron Moritz, 46, of Melvindale; Vincent Fedora, 46, of Shelby Township; John Sklarczyk, 47, of Detroit; Gerald Moore, 55, of Garden City; Dennis Arrington, 47, of Detroit; and two other unnamed workers. Each suffered life-threatening burns, ranging over 30 to 90 percent of their bodies, and doctors who are carrying out emergency procedures say their chances for survival are being determined hour by hour.

Four others burned in the explosion are in serious condition at the University of Michigan burn center. They are Chris Getts, 46, of Livonia; Ralph Irvin, 53, of Detroit; John Kucharski, 40, of Howell and Geremia Villalta, 64, of Allen Park. Gerald Nyland, 47, of Westland is listed in fair condition.

The tragedy at Ford Rouge deeply affected many workers and their families who confront the dangers of death and injury inside the auto plants every day. In the aftermath of the explosion there was an outpouring of sympathy and support from working people, with hundreds donating blood for the victims and contributing to a fund for the families. On Wednesday over $2,000 was collected at Chrysler's North Jefferson Assembly plant in Detroit.

Less than two weeks after the disaster, news coverage on the explosion and its aftermath has all but ended and full production has been resumed at the Rouge complex. The media has chiefly shifted its attention to whether Ford Motor Co., after its $6.45 billion acquisition of Volvo's car operations, now intends to buy BMW.

Neither the actions of Ford management nor the United Auto Workers union have indicated that the joint investigation they are undertaking, along with the Michigan Occupational Health and Safety Administration, will produce anything more than a cover-up of the causes of the disaster.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**

© World Socialist Web Site