

Ford Flat Rock workers halt production after worker mangled in machinery

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The WSWS urges auto workers to form a rank-and-file committee at Flat Rock Assembly. Read our statement, UAW and Ford silent as anger simmers in wake of injury at Flat Rock Assembly.

Contact us *with information and to sign up for the Autoworker Newsletter.*

Ford workers at the Flat Rock assembly plant south of Detroit halted production on the second shift early Friday morning when a worker was trapped in machinery and her legs crushed. The company tried to resume production and extend the shift from 10 hours to 10.7 in the aftermath of the emergency line shut down at the plant that employs 3,500.

The United Auto Workers and the local news media have suppressed details of the incident; however, workers reported on Facebook that the second shift of nearly 1,500 refused company demands for a resumption of production and walked out of the plant in horror and disgust. Workers contacted by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* said they anticipate a union-company cover-up at perfunctory safety meetings when they get to work on Monday.

The United Auto Workers has enabled a continuing assault on jobs, wages, work rules and safety conditions since the auto industry restructuring under the Obama administration in 2009. At Flat Rock Assembly there is no local contract in place, giving the company a free hand to impose changes at will in job classifications and descriptions, work rules and safety regulations.

The automakers have reaped record profits through an influx of lower-paid, second tier, temporary and part-time workers who are instructed by the UAW to keep their mouths shut.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* recently reported on the agreement by the UAW at the General Motors Lordstown, Ohio complex to allow jobs held by higher-seniority, legacy workers, such as, material handling, for example, to be assigned to lower-paid,

temporary, part-time new hires of a GM subsidiary called Lordstown GM Subsystems.

Workers from the Flat Rock Assembly plant spoke to the *WSWS Autoworkers Newsletter* over the weekend. “They are being very secretive about it,” said a full seniority worker on days. “I want to know what happened and why they want to cover it up.”

The incident occurred on second shift at 1:00 a.m., Friday morning. A Temporary Part Time (TPT) worker said, “It sounded like she was on a job that she was not familiar with. I’m a TPT, and they put us all on jobs that we don’t know. It just sounded like that was what happened.

“We are floaters, which means that they put us where they need us. We are not really trained well. They take just a few minutes to show you the job. None of us know what really happened,” she continued, “but it sounded like this is what could have caused it.”

A senior worker said, “A lot of people at the plant now are beginning to realize that they signed themselves out of a lot of protections when they accepted the contract back in 2015. Ford management and the UAW rallied right at the end and campaigned up and down the plant telling workers to vote yes and get the \$10,000 signing bonus.

“Now we don’t even know if the vote was legitimate.

“One of the things [the UAW] gave up was the percentage cap on how many TPTs the company could hire. Now they hire as many temps at \$15.78 per hour as they want. Ford wants cheap labor.”

Another TPT added, “I heard she was a floater. That’s what I do, wherever they need you. You get minutes of training. It used to be that you had three days to train on a job. That was probably something the union gave up in 2015.

“There are a lot of really angry TPTs in the plant right now. They lied to us in orientation. The union comes in to sign you up to take money out of your paycheck. They give this big spiel that if you are ever forced to do something you’re not supposed to, come and tell them and they will take care of it right away.

“I was on a job for a year and a half that was supposed to be for legacy workers only. I was working 55 and 59 hours a week. So I went and told the union. I never heard from them.

“We have our own Facebook page for TPTs. There is a lot of really angry TPTs in the plant right now. You are not supposed to be kept as a temp for more than two years. We don’t get insurance, no dental, no profit sharing. The medical coverage is really bad.

“As a TPT, you are only supposed to work three days. When they bump you up to STF, (Staffing Temporary Full-time) they can work you as much as they want. Then you get pharmacy.”

The Ford Woodhaven Stamping Plant where the young TPT worker Coby Hennings died six months ago is just down the street from Flat Rock Assembly. Several of the workers we spoke with had signed up to receive the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* several months ago when they were searching for news about the young man’s death.

The story has been suppressed, but not forgotten. It was similar brutal working conditions that Hennings was apparently discussing with UAW officials when he died. Workers expressed deep sorrow and empathy for his parents and family.

“I read a lot about the case,” said a TPT worker from Flat Rock. “She feels that her son did not kill himself. That poor kid. It is hard enough to be a TPT at one plant. I don’t see him killing himself,” she added, noting that her own son is 18.

“With all the corruption among union officials, I wouldn’t trust them,” she continued. “I would feel just like Coby’s parents. They don’t believe the official line that he shot himself. Somebody else must have done it. The fact that the union never went to his mother, never spoke to her, didn’t go to the funeral—that tells me they are guilty.”

Another worker said, “They have four different tiers at our plant. They keep us segregated. You know the saying, ‘United we stand, divided we fall.’ Now we have first tier, second tier, STF and TPT. TPTs are only supposed to work three days. STF allows them to work you five.

“A TPT starts at \$15.78. After 52 weeks, you get a raise of \$0.88. I’m on my second year and I still only have one \$0.88 raise. We thought we would get our raises on our start date, but it is based on weeks worked and we were laid off for 9 weeks last year.

“You ask the union about it, and they say, ‘Let me get back to you on that.’ And they never do. They do nothing for you.

“They keep us so scared, we don’t want to say anything. If you call the union, or complain, they will send you to trim which is a really, really hard place to work. Some things weigh 30 to 50 pounds. There are jobs there I know I cannot

do. I would get fired. You cannot refuse the job assignment.

“They are constantly separating the members and working them against each other.

“There are certain jobs that only legacy workers are supposed to do. But they get away with putting TPTs in those spots all the time. It’s a running battle. And you never get any answers from the union.

“One hundred people have retired, and they have not hired anyone to replace them. They are doubling up on jobs. That makes it more dangerous.”

The Ford contract and every other agreement negotiated by the corrupt UAW must be repudiated by autoworkers. They have been rendered null and void by the revelations that top UAW officials had for years been taking payments from the auto companies in exchange for pushing pro-company contracts.

This horrifying accident at the Flat Rock plant provides further proof that the UAW is not a workers’ organization, but a labor contractor, whose job is to enforce poverty-level wages, speed-up and dangerous working conditions in the plants and do whatever it can to suppress opposition.

Rank-and-file factory committees, independent of the union and the company, must be organized to prepare and coordinate opposition. The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* urges autoworkers to contact us to help organize this fight.

The mounting resistance of autoworkers takes place under conditions where teachers throughout the US and internationally are in rebellion against their unions, which have worked to isolate and betray a series of recent strikes—in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona. A successful fight by autoworkers requires a complete break with the pro-company UAW and the waging of an independent fight side by side with teachers and other sections of the working class coming into struggle.



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