

Form rank-and-file factory committee to enforce worker safety

UAW and Ford silent as anger simmers in wake of injury at Flat Rock Assembly

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8 May 2018

Corporate and United Auto Worker (UAW) officials are withholding details of the tragic accident early Friday morning at the Ford Flat Rock Assembly Plant south of Detroit that sparked a walkout by production workers.

An as-yet unidentified female worker on the second shift suffered a leg injury while on the assembly line. When management tried to restart production, workers rebelled and instead walked out of the plant.

Flat Rock Assembly workers told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* that management and the UAW have told them nothing since the accident, not even the name or the condition of the worker involved. Ford did not respond to inquiries from the *Autoworker Newsletter*.

An *Autoworker Newsletter* reporting team visited Flat Rock Assembly Monday afternoon. Workers described a brutal management regime in the plant, enforced with the assistance of UAW officials, who act as junior foremen.

“The union never tells us anything,” was a common refrain.

Several workers told reporters that they had already read the report of the accident posted on the *Autoworker Newsletter* Facebook page. “They are not talking about it,” one veteran worker said. “On night shift they say keep it running at all cost. You see something wrong... ‘keep it running.’”

Referring to the injured worker, he reported, “I heard that on her situation the guy that was with her didn’t know to pull the red cord to stop the line. Another worker knew to stop it, otherwise it would have been much worse.”

He continued, “They stress out the TPTs [Temporary

Part Time workers]. I worked seven years as a part-timer before getting a full-time job. The way they work us, all our jobs are overloaded. They have added things to all the jobs in order to cut people.”

Another worker observed, “It is never a good thing when people get hurt. Working around machinery takes a high level of care and awareness. We are not coming to work to get hurt.”

A worker with 23 years gave this account of the accident: “All I know is that she was riding a ‘moon buggy’ [four-wheel automated cart holding heavy parts] doing engine work. It went to the end of the line, and she fell in the hole.”

The worker ridiculed a claim posted on Facebook that the UAW plant chairman called for the walkout. “The workers decided they didn’t want to work anymore. They told the union that they wouldn’t work because they were stressed out.”

“I have always told the union that they can pack their bags up and get the f—k out.”

The appalling levels of stress and pressure and the hostility of union officials to guarantee even basic safety conditions urgently raise the need for the formation of an independent rank-and-file factory committee of workers to defend workers interests. The organization of a factory committee will provide the basis for workers to enforce line speeds and block all efforts by management to compel workers to labor under unsafe conditions.

No one can place the slightest confidence in the bogus investigation by the UAW-Ford joint committee on health and safety. The life and livelihoods of workers cannot be left in the hands of management and their UAW stooges.

Nor can workers place any confidence in the Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA). Under terms of a joint agreement between Ford, MIOSHA and the UAW, factory managers will be pre-notified by MIOSHA before safety inspections, and the company and UAW will receive an advance notification package at least two weeks before the scheduled MIOSHA visit.

Such a sweetheart arrangement leaves workers completely at the mercy of management. This situation urgently militates for the independent initiative and organization of workers, who already demonstrated their unity and strength in the walkout last week.

Such a fight must embrace the defense of TPT workers, who face constant uncertainty and intimidation. It has been more than six months since the young TPT worker Jacoby Hennings died at the Ford Woodhaven Stamping plant just miles from Flat Rock Assembly, under still unexplained circumstances. Workers at Flat Rock Assembly said they had heard of Hennings's death and understood the stress he must have been under.

One TPT worker at Flat Rock Assembly said, "They have tried every way they know how to keep us divided and fighting against each other." As for the UAW, he said, "They never come out when you need them."

Another young worker noted that there were 600-700 TPT workers in the Flat Rock plant. He said he was beyond tired of the uncertainty he faced. "I have been a TPT for 27 months. I work full-time. I build the same cars, I work the same shifts. I have never been late or called off sick. I have lost three profit-sharing checks.

"Every job I went to before Ford, it is just 90 days before you are full-time."

The walkout by workers at Flat Rock Assembly has drawn the attention of other autoworkers in the area.

A veteran Ford worker in Romeo, Michigan, told the *Autoworker Newsletter* that he understood why Flat Rock Assembly workers took a stand.

"injuries in the plant freak everyone out. They are horrific. I wasn't there of course, but the injured worker could have been trying to get ahead on her job. When I worked the line, there was a drinking fountain 15 feet away from me. I could not get to it until break time, that was how loaded my job was."

He predicted that there would be attempts at retaliation taken against workers in the plant. "They are

going to warn the people, you do that again, Ford will pull its product out. It will be threats and intimidation.

"The company is totally walking all over us. The union allowed the company to put team leaders, 'straw bosses' working hand in hand with management. It is a very ugly situation. The union has become nothing but a bunch of company kiss-asses.

"I see this next contract my pension is in jeopardy. I have read about what happened to the Honeywell workers."

The *Autoworker Newsletter* encourages autoworkers with information relating to health and safety issues at the Flat Rock Assembly plant to contact us and share your experiences.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact