

“That place is a death trap”

Faurecia workers respond to exposure of conditions at US auto parts plant

Our reporters
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The energetic response to the exposure by the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* of appalling conditions, including workplace deaths, at the Faurecia plant in Saline, Michigan speaks to the situation facing the working class throughout the auto parts industry and more broadly.

The article has been read by thousands of workers and has been shared over 800 times on Facebook. Current and former Faurecia workers from plants in Saline; Sterling Heights, Michigan; Granger, Indiana; Simpsonville, Kentucky; Dexter, Missouri; Dayton, Ohio and other locations have commented about their own experiences. Still others contacted the *Autoworker Newsletter* directly.

French-based Faurecia is a transnational auto parts maker with factories in 35 countries. It is the sixth largest auto parts maker in the world and produces seats, interior systems and emission control technology.

Faurecia workers repeatedly described have been treated like “slaves” or that their factories were akin to “plantations.” Others spoke about the indifference and outright hostility of the United Auto Workers union, recounting a number of instances of its defense of the company’s interests.

In the comments below, workers’ names have been changed to protect them from reprisals by either the company or the UAW.

“I worked at Faurecia in Simpsonville for almost three years,” said a worker in Kentucky. “It started out really well, then went really bad. I think the corporation as a whole needs investigation.

“We tried calling the labor board, and OSHA [the Occupational Safety and Health Administration], even human and equal rights [agencies]. None of them

cared.”

Lindsay, who previously worked at the Saline Faurecia plant, said she had experienced what was described in the initial WSWS report, “and more! That place is horrible and a death trap!”

“People died and there were always injuries because they would just force you to do everything without training.”

Lindsay described the degrading treatment workers underwent and the denial of basic rights, including bathroom breaks. “I remember a lady said she was older, and she told me that sometimes they wouldn’t let her use the bathroom so she said that she would wear a pad in case she leaked on herself. It’s ridiculous.”

John formerly worked at Faurecia in Saline, having stayed on after the plant was bought from its previous owner, Automotive Components Holding (ACH). “Once Faurecia came they fired everybody that knew what to do or offered them low-paying contracts. I was forced to sign with Faurecia after ACH left or I wouldn’t have had a ‘guaranteed’ job. As a new hire I couldn’t take the chance of ‘hopeful’ employment. My wages didn’t decrease, but they did not progress either.

“That place is a madhouse,” he continued. “Long hours, countless safety violations and my friends are dying in that place. My friend Connie died there! They ignored her. She was such a sweet person. Medical is hardly ever open. And the union is just a party club.”

Like many others, he described frequent mandatory overtime and grueling hours. “Seven days a week, 12 hours is too much. The turnover is like a revolving door. It wasn’t like that before. Because they cut shifts to save money. They spread the hours between two shifts.”

Henry, a worker currently employed at the Faurecia plant in Saline, denounced the role of the UAW in upholding management's authority. "Our last union administration was the worst ever. During the last contract negotiations, the company stated that they would take our \$900 holiday bonus and reduce it to \$400 to offset the cost of keeping BCBS [Blue Cross Blue Shield health insurance]."

"We the membership agreed to this in order to keep our insurance. A year or so later, the company changed insurance companies and our local allowed it. This was done without the vote of the membership. The union chairman and bargaining rep agreed to this, stating that the contract didn't specify BCBS, rather just that the company had to provide insurance."

"We've asked numerous times why a grievance hasn't been filed," he continued, "due to the fact that they stated they took our bonus to offset the cost of keeping BCBS and then changed the insurance anyway, and also why wasn't the membership allowed to vote on that issue. We get no answers from the local UAW."

"Seems the local is more concerned in throwing 'mixers' then focusing on the issues at hand."

Richard, another former worker at the Saline plant, spoke about the relentless pace of work at the facility while he was there. "I worked in the west warehouse and unloaded trucks of parts and delivered parts to the line by hand. In the beginning this was very difficult, as I was the only person who did this and would get in trouble if the assembly line ran out of a part while I was unloading the truck or stocking another part of the assembly line."

"I was supposed to restock the assembly line about every 15 minutes. Eventually after about a month of this I got a new hire to help me with these tasks and my job became easier. Having never had a factory job before or since I can't really compare it. But in the west warehouse I worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week, except for a couple weeks where I had one day off."

"This was the primary cause of my car crash that could've very easily been fatal," Richard said. "I was too sleep deprived and fell asleep at the wheel and cut down a tree with my Pontiac. I didn't really like working there but the pay was the best I had received at that point in my life. I liked the people I worked with and not many of the people I worked for."

"Most people don't like the union," he continued. "Didn't do much, that's for sure. Walked around and chatted but that's all I saw of them."

As with others, he noted that workers had died at the plant, at least one of suicide. "I had heard of more than one person dying, but that was near the end of 2016, so I don't know if that count of two people was for 2017. I know a guy committed suicide in the plant. Sneaked a handgun in if I remember correctly."

The worker who initially contacted the *Autoworker Newsletter* to expose conditions at Faurecia said, "Thank you guys for taking the time and caring," adding, "I've seen the response and it's still so much that wasn't even touched on...hopefully it gets enough attention for change."

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* will continue to pull back the veil on the appalling situation facing autoworkers, whether at the auto parts plants, the Big Three companies, or elsewhere. The WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party call for the formation of organizations independent of the pro-corporate UAW, rank-and-file factory and workplace committees, so that workers can assert their interests on the shop floor and beyond. We encourage those who are interested in organizing these committees, or who have a story to tell, to contact us today.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact