

“International solidarity would give so much power back to the working class”

Chicago Ford worker discusses issues in 2019 contract fight

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Kelly is a worker at Ford Chicago Assembly Plant (CAP). She got in touch with the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* to speak out about the working conditions, the collusion of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union with Ford management and the degrading way workers in the plant are treated. Kelly voiced her demands for the upcoming 2019 contract struggle and supported the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter*’s call for an international strategy for the working class. Her name has been changed to protect her from retaliation by Ford and the UAW.

WSWS: What are the conditions at the Chicago Assembly Plant?

“We have a pest control issue, and there is no exterminator in the plant. There are rats in the plant, and they are not afraid of you. Not a dollar of that billion dollars which was invested in Ford Chicago Assembly Plant went to pest control. Workers have to take care of the rat problem themselves.

When it was hot last week, we were supposed to have quenchers and ice provided to us. I didn’t see either of those. They gave us some water bottles floating in hot water. The areas like trim and chassis which are hot don’t have the powerful fans that they have in body.

There’s a huge heater that’s used to make the electrical wiring pliable. When it’s on and the temperature is hot out, it gets up to 105 degrees in that part of the plant.

Whenever they have the newspapers come in, they have the press stay in Pre-Delivery. They never let them leave past that point; it’s very clean. If you actually came into the plant, you would see rats. They

dart out everywhere. They come out of the garbage and walk on the ground right by where you’re sitting. A rat once stole a worker’s food when they weren’t looking.

We also need good food and water. You can’t drink the water there—it’s contaminated. The health department shut down the cafeteria in the upstairs part of the plant.

I could make a phone call to anyone in the plant right now and ask them what they’re allergic to, and they’d say, “everything.” There’s so much stuff floating around in the air. I take a 24-hour allergy pill every day of my life—welcome to CAP!

Once there was a terrible smell that came from the bathrooms for years, and it would make some workers vomit if they smelled it waft over while they were eating. Then they shut those bathrooms down and turned them into offices, and like magic, the smell was gone.

WSWS: What are the conditions for Temporary Part-Time and Short-Term Supplemental workers?

Kelly: The Temporary Part-Time (TPT) workers do the same work, and actually even harder work, than the full-time people on the line and they have no protection, no pay, no health care, no benefits. Then they can get full-time when they move up to Short-Term Supplemental, but that’s not guaranteed. They can switch you right back to TPT whenever they want, and you have to start from the bottom again. That is wrong, it should not be happening. Everyone needs job security.

WSWS: What is the role of the role of the UAW?

Kelly: Management and union are in bed with each

other. Our union is so corrupt. They try to deteriorate solidarity. You may have half a mind to get into the union to have a safe place, but I don't want to get into the union. I don't want to become corrupt. You can get into the union and have job security for you and yours, but the dilemma is that then you've become one of them.

I am convinced that the UAW local elections are rigged. The same committeemen won who were hated by so many people. Last round of elections, I was so involved in voting and debating with people, but this time I didn't even bother voting because it doesn't make any difference.

WSWS: Autoworkers are angry about their conditions and want change, but they need a way to fight back. This will happen only through the building of rank-and-file committees, led by the most advanced workers, which are independent of the unions and express the will of the workers.

Kelly: I agree, but a lot will have to change for that to happen. Management tries to make people fear for their job security at Chicago Assembly Plant. A lot of people think there is nothing else out there, and Ford takes advantage of that. I try to talk to workers and convince them that they don't have to let management treat them without respect.

WSWS: GM, Ford, Volkswagen and other companies are closing factories and laying off workers all over the world. The *Autoworker Newsletter* fights for the unity of US autoworkers with our class brothers and sisters in Mexico, Canada and around the world. What do you think about an international strategy for autoworkers?

Kelly: We are most definitely connected with the workers in other countries. Every part that comes into that plant comes from all over the world, mostly from Mexico and Thailand. It's not a strategy that we ever use, but it's possible that we could, especially with the technology we have now.

With all the international parts that we have, the union treats those people in those countries with hostility. When you start with the company, they try to make you think badly about other countries. If you drive a foreign car, you have to park in a parking lot called "the rice fields." It's a 20-minute walk from the plant. Ford and the UAW won't hire workers at the plant who are of Asian background.

International solidarity would give so much power back to the working class—that is where the power is, with the working class.

WSWS: What are your thoughts on the planned raids that the Trump administration says it will carry out against immigrant families in cities like Chicago?

Kelly: The immigrant raids that are being planned by the Trump administration are another reminder that this administration is crazy. I've seen a couple articles where immigrants were rounded up and the authorities knew their spouses were not home. It's scary that they are really planning this. In this day and age to have such barbaric tactics, it's unfathomable to think that these things exist but they do.

We think about the things that these families are going through, and we can only imagine how scary it must be. My kids and I read a lot about the Nazis and the concentration camps and the Great Depression. If you don't get a full grasp on your history, you will be prey to its repetition in the future.



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