Autoworkers speak out against UAW's disregard of safety during scorching heat

Jessica Goldstein
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A record-breaking heat wave continued across the US Midwest and East Coast over the weekend. Abnormally high temperatures have affected about one third of the country over the past several weeks. One-day high-temperature records were set in six US cities, including Detroit, which reached 97 degrees Fahrenheit.

Despite public service announcements broadcast across the US warning the population to avoid strenuous activity and stay in air-conditioned spaces, autoworkers were told to report to work in cities where heat indexes reached over 100 degrees Fahrenheit, including Chicago; Indianapolis; Louisville, Kentucky; and many more.

At the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, workers received automated robocalls from plant management telling them to expect to report to work on Friday with high temperatures forecast to reach above 100 degrees.

At the Ford Kentucky Truck Plant in Louisville, a worker named Matt Goodlett was found unresponsive around 9 p.m. Friday night, when outside temperatures were as hot as 96 degrees and 108 degrees according to the heat index, which is a measure of the combined effects of air temperature and humidity.

An autoworker in Arlington, Texas, wrote in to the World Socialist Web Site *Autoworker Newsletter* about the deadly conditions caused by overheating and speedup at their plant. “In Arlington, TX, UAW 276, we have had at least five to ten [heat-related injuries] this summer so far, line speed increases recently, and were running three shifts [per day] Monday-Saturday since 2010, we’re so exhausted from work, and heat; line speed increases have also caused deaths in our plant, strokes, injuries, etc.!!!”

A worker from Louisville Assembly plant wrote to the *Autoworker Newsletter*: “People are getting sick, seems like a couple from every area going [to] medical. They finally posted Heat Stress Policy on KTP Facebook, not for sure if posted on LAP. They need to declare a disaster and shut the place down...still 11 hours [shifts]. They’re passing out expired Gatorade. OSHA [federal safety organization] needs to get involved, they say 68 to 76 degrees for office workers that’s there standard. Why aren’t we kept to the same standard, this hard physical labor? I think your article ‘Roasting on line’ by Marcus Day is the reason they put a Heat Policy on KTP’s Facebook page, because it talks about Todd Dunn, [the local UAW] President. Everyone is wanting A/C. They want to take 4 million out [of the UAW] General Fund at local to pay for units before the Local or IUAW blows it on something, [like to] build more cabins or give themselves raise.”

The *Autoworker Newsletter* asked a worker from Ford Chicago Assembly plant about the heat on Friday, who responded: “Extremely hot!!! Most people brought their own ice. I know we are supposed to get heat breaks under these conditions, which we haven’t gotten.”

Other workers at the same plant took to Facebook to denounce the company and the union for forcing workers to come to work in the extreme heat and refusing to provide adequate safety measures.

“I’ve paid over $600 in union dues so far this year. They can give me a few cold waters with that. Call me greedy and ungrateful I guess.”

One worker posted on Friday a picture of a locked ice cooler: “In paint X25, ice cooler is locked up yet its supposed [to be] for heat stress days. It was cut open yesterday and someone locked it up. Why are these coolers locked up?”

Another wrote: “I got an idea for this heat. Since [there] ain’t any air conditioning on the plant floor, then it shouldn’t be in the entire building. Then we’d

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see how these people in management and some of these union reps who are enjoying AC [complain] about [poor] attendance."

The heat wave once again exposes the incompatibility of an economic system based on the chase for private profit with the elementary health and safety needs of workers. While Ford, Fiat Chrysler, and General Motors generate billions in dollars of profit each year from the labor of workers, these same corporations can provide no money for basic necessities such as air cooling and cold water. Needless to say, the idea of shutting the plants and providing workers paid time off during periods of excessive heat never comes up.

The UAW, acting as agents for the auto companies, completely accepts this situation, insisting that the drive for profits outweighs workers' most basic needs. In exchange, management funnels tens of millions into the coffers of the UAW to fund the six-figure salaries of union executives.

The refusal of the UAW to wage a struggle on the question of excessive heat conditions in the plant foreshadows their inevitable acceptance of further massive concessions in the ongoing 2019 national auto contract negotiations. It again points to the importance of the call by the *Autoworker Newsletter* for workers to form their own independent rank-and-file organizations for struggle. Such workplace committees should advance their own demands, including the right to a safe workplace, including the right to stop work under dangerous conditions. In relation to the national contract, workers should insist on significant wage raises, fully paid health care benefits, a return to the eight-hour workday, and an end to contract and temporary labor with all workers raised to full-time status.

Against the drive by transnational auto giants like General Motors, Ford, Toyota, Fiat Chrysler and Volkswagen, workers need international unity and the coordination of their struggles. Whether they are in Coahuila, Mexico, Chicago, or Oshawa, Canada, autoworkers are facing ever-fiercer attacks on their jobs, living standards and working conditions.

The UAW, a nationalist organization, is utterly incapable of organizing workers on an international scale. Instead it seeks to scapegoat workers in other countries, claiming American workers have the same interests as the auto bosses.

An autoworker at Ford Chicago Assembly told the *Autoworker Newsletter*: "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.

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

The working class must take up the fight against capitalism, an international system of class exploitation. The nationalist program and orientation of the unions offer no way forward. We urge autoworkers to contact the *Autoworker Newsletter* about an international socialist strategy to advance the interests of the working class.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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