

“They will keep doing this unless we stop production on our own”

US autoworkers demand industry shutdown to fight coronavirus

Tom Hall
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Work in the auto industry, or have a family member who does? We want to hear how the coronavirus pandemic is impacting you, and what you think workers should demand to address it. Email us at autoworkers@wsws.org, or message us at the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter Facebook page. Comments will be published anonymously.

Support is growing rapidly for an immediate shutdown of the auto industry to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Autoworkers continued to send the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* comments denouncing the decision by the companies to maintain full production in the midst of a deadly pandemic.

Faced with overwhelming hostility from workers, local level UAW officials at Ford's Dearborn and Louisville truck plants have made some noises about calling for temporary shutdowns and have filed token grievances. But this is nothing but a cover for the UAW to force workers to remain on the job. The UAW moved quickly to suppress the job action by Warren Truck workers, who stopped production at the plant's paint shop, fearing that it would provoke a full-scale walkout. Unifor, the Canadian autoworkers union, was instrumental in shutting down a work stoppage last week at Windsor Assembly.

Autoworkers must take matters into their own hands to protect their own safety and the safety of their families and neighbors. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party call on workers to form rank-and-file committees to force a shutdown of all nonessential industries and demand full compensation for lost hours. At the same time, they must demand a massive and coordinated global response in opposition to the squandering of trillions of dollars to prop up the stock markets and corporate profit.

Below is a selection of workers' comments.

FCA Sterling Heights Assembly, Sterling Heights, Michigan

Worker 1:

There is nothing being done. We ran out of soap Saturday. I had to come home and wash my hands thoroughly. Workers aren't showing up and supervisors are freaking out. They know the companies don't give a damn. The plant manager is nowhere to be seen.

Because of manpower shortage and production stoppages, I think we made 500 trucks on Saturday. They made us figure out how to get the line started. They're just putting band-aids on the problem. They don't want us to stop work because they would have to pay us [for time off].

If they are walking out [at Warren Truck] we need to know this, and they are not telling us. I am not paying union dues anymore, give me [my dues] back. It's a garbage union. I feel disgraced for my father. He thought he would help his son get a better job. It is a disgrace that we have to wage this fight all over again [to establish basic rights established in an earlier era]. If Warren Truck walks out, we should follow them. I am ready for it; individual actions won't do it.

They shut down all of Las Vegas, and they are still running us. Why are we building trucks? We are making luxury trucks most of us can't afford.

We have to come together as brothers and fight [the companies]. They will keep doing it unless we stop production on our own. Everyone needs to walk out and show they need to pay us because it is an international crisis. We should not be in a plant exposing ourselves to the virus. We will get everyone sick, and it will keep spreading. I would not be surprised if Detroit becomes ground zero.

Worker 2:

They are making us go to work with hundreds and thousands of other workers, meaning this will spread. They are doing this to make more money. They want to milk the cow for as long as they can before shutting down these plants.

They are keeping us working while everything else is shut down. Even the casinos have closed, and they have just as many people as the automotive plants. Management is working remotely from home, but we are being exposed. The higher seniority workers are taking sick days, but the younger workers have to take a hit on our attendance.

Nothing like this has ever happened. I remember seeing a documentary in high school about the Ebola epidemic, and I was very nervous when it came here because I knew how many people were killed by that viral infection. Entire villages in Africa were wiped out in a few days. There are lot more people in towns and cities in America, and this could be terrible.

Worker 3:

The union had team members come in on Sunday to sanitize our work [stations] using alcohol wipes. Today we came to work, and they held the line for five minutes to give us an opportunity to wipe our stations down with alcohol wipes. No hand sanitizer was given out, no face masks were given out, just our standard PPE [Personal Protective Equipment]. ... The sanitation or janitorial crew members were instructed to clean the bathrooms for [a few minutes] after breaks. They sprayed down the refrigerators and lunch tables. That's it.

There were reports that three people were sent home who were suspected of having the virus on Thursday, ... but there wasn't any follow up. A crewmember from my department was sent home today; no followup as well with her regarding her symptoms. They simply cleaned off her station with alcohol wipes and replaced her with another worker.

FCA Sterling Stamping, Sterling Heights, Michigan

I work at Sterling Stamping. I went to my safety department to request a safety mask and was refused. On the shop floor we have community computers that we have to use daily throughout the eight-hour shift. Team leaders in a business unit have to input data every hour on these community computers. We are not being provided any hand sanitizer throughout the plant. There are no extra precautions being taken like they are reporting.

FCA Toledo Jeep, Toledo, Ohio

I am writing with concerns in Ohio at the Toledo Jeep plant specifically. The governor here in Ohio has shut down virtually everything from schools, to churches, bowling alleys, restaurants and bars, yet thousands of citizens are being forced to enter the complex daily where there are virtually no extra precautions being made.

A "worker to worker" went out stating that employees were to stay five minutes before and after shift to clean their areas, but there are no "disinfecting" cleaning supplies. The water fountains have been quarantined, and the plant has stated they will provide water, but I have yet to receive any and continue to

bring my own. So now, we are working in close proximity in huge masses with no disinfectant products and no drinking water, and the company still sees no issue with forcing the workforce [to stay on the job] and continues to mandate a 60+ hour work week on top of that.

I am taking an unpaid FMLA [Family and Medical Leave Act] leave now because I am concerned for my health and the health of my family. I refuse to go into that cesspool and bring something home and infect my family members because the company refuses to look out for the best interests of their employees and continues to stuff their pockets.

Parts plant, Northwest Ohio

I am a union member of the UAW at a plant in Northwest Ohio which manufactures automobile, service, and boat parts for Jeep, Mercury Marine, Ford, and Hino. At most of our work stations, we are working in a space with less than six feet between us and the person next to us. A typical shift has anywhere from 100-200 people, depending on call-offs, vacations, and such.

Our break room is always shoulder to shoulder during lunch time, and our smoking area is two tables for about 30 people to share. We already have compromised respiratory systems working here due to the fiberglass, paint fumes, and raw materials we work with. We work heavily with international entities, mainly in Asian countries, and they frequently send over representatives to tour the plant.

Paired with the abundance of employees in the 50+ age range, I believe our plant is ripe for contamination. What makes it worse is our sick day policy essentially forces us to work through it, because we either have to take three days off with a doctor's note, or take a point, neither of which many of us can afford to do.

To my knowledge, there are no talks of shutting us down anytime soon. I fear for my safety and my ability to provide for my family in these terrible times.



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