

Ontario Toyota worker describes company inaction in the face of coronavirus pandemic

Carl Bronski
20 March 2020

Faced with the sudden growth of wildcat action against continued production in the United States and Canada, Toyota announced Thursday afternoon that it would close all North American operations for two weeks beginning this coming Monday. In Canada, this include 8,500 workers at Toyota's assembly plants in Cambridge and Woodstock, Ontario, which produce the RAV4 and Lexus RX and NX models.

"This action is being taken due to the increasing social and economic impact of the COVID-19 virus, a significant decline in market demand and the desire to protect the health and safety of our team members, dealers, suppliers and communities," said Toyota in a letter to workers.

The company's feigned "concern" for safety is belied by their insistence that some operations will continue until Monday, allowing the virus ample time to spread throughout the facilities. At the Cambridge, Ontario assembly plant, one worker has already been diagnosed as suffering from the coronavirus. The worker had been off sick with virus symptoms since March 12. Currently, there have been 12 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the area.

Even after it was publicly announced Wednesday that the worker had tested positive and the afternoon shift sent home early that evening, management had instructed workers to report for work the following morning.

Toyota, like Honda in Canada (which also will temporarily close), is a non-union company. Attempts by Unifor and its predecessor Canadian Auto Workers union to organize the Japanese transplants have consistently failed to gain a majority at the two companies. Workers have witnessed the string of concessions contracts and plant closures overseen with the collaboration of Unifor and rightly see it as an

organization that takes union dues and gives nothing in return. This found further verification in the role played by Unifor in shutting down a partial work stoppage at Fiat Chrysler's Windsor Assembly.

A reader in the Toyota Cambridge plant wrote to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* prior to the announcement of the two-week shutdown as part of an on-line campaign of workers to expose the utter callousness of the company. We reprint that letter here:

"We have just confirmed our first case of coronavirus at our Toyota plant in Cambridge, Ontario. We have been [told] about the virus for the past two weeks and told that the plant was taking all precautions to keep us safe and keep the plant as clean as possible. We were told that we would have disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizers throughout the plant as of March 13.

"When we arrived for our shift on March 16, we were [told] that one team member was being tested for coronavirus and 24 people were in self-isolation from the disease. [As of Wednesday] we still have not received any new cleaning product to keep us healthy and safe. We were told that Toyota was going to shut down production on March 23 and 24 to do a thorough clean of the plant.

"It should also be noted that as of March 16 we ramped up our production from 8 to 10 hour shifts to keep up with demand of our vehicles. This all sounds very suspicious since the world has been put into isolation. I'm not sure who is buying these cars at this time. It sounds to us like they are putting our health at risk to maintain current inventory levels.

"At lunchtime on March 18 we were told that we had one confirmed case of the virus and that that person had been off work since March 12. They sent everyone home with pay [that day] but I find 6 days a long time to get results for such a dangerous virus. I find it hard

to believe that Toyota made us come in to work and put our health at risk when they knew someone had the virus in the plant.

“I am unsure what results they expect from having a 2 day shutdown to clean the plant from what may be airborne or transmitted through touch. It is my belief that until the world gets a handle on the virus, it doesn’t matter how clean we make things. If someone comes in sick, it will transmit to everyone.

“All around the world governments are banning any gatherings of 50 people, yet us autoworkers here in Cambridge would be in contact with 1,500 to 2,000 other people on any given day...We are told daily that “Toyota Cares”. It is becoming more and more apparent that “Toyota Cares” about bottom line profits over their team members health and safety.”

Shut down all nonessential production to halt the spread of the coronavirus! Distribute our statement, “How to fight the COVID-19 pandemic: A program of action for the working class” and form rank-and-file committees at your workplace. For assistance and to distribute information about actions workers are taking at your plant, contact us immediately at autoworkers@wsws.org or on Facebook.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact