

Fiat Chrysler skilled trade contractors in Detroit walk out as workers demand total auto shutdown

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The global wave of walkouts in the auto industries continued on Thursday evening when more than 1,000 skilled trades contractors stopped work on the renovation of the Fiat Chrysler Mack Engine Complex in Detroit, which is being reopened to produce Jeep brand vehicles later this year.

The workers took the action after management demanded they stay on the job, even though FCA production workers have been sent home over coronavirus concerns. One skilled trade contractor at the Mack Engine site reportedly tested positive for COVID-19.

A skilled trades contractor told the local Fox affiliate, “We walked, we had to. There are over 1,000 people. This COVID-19 lives the longest on steel and we are building steel construction.

“We don’t have any hand sanitizer. There is no bathroom on the site. There are 2 in general assembly, but there are 400 electricians. There are 100 millwrights, there are countless other trades.

“We don’t know what kind of repercussions there will be. We left out of concern for ourselves and our families.”

In the wake of wildcat actions at Fiat Chrysler plants throughout Michigan and Ohio Tuesday and Wednesday, most car manufacturers operating in North America, including FCA, Ford, General Motors, Volkswagen, BMW, Toyota and Honda, Nissan and other smaller Asian-based automakers, announced temporary shutdowns of their assembly operations for one to two weeks.

Tesla Motors, which had attempted to remain open during a government lockdown in the San Francisco Bay area on “national security” grounds, became the

last major automaker to announce a shutdown on Thursday.

But a rotten deal agreed to between the UAW and General Motors allows the company’s Customer Care Aftersales parts warehouse to continue operations. Workers can take a voluntary layoff, without supplemental unemployment benefits for temporary employees, or continue reporting to work.

The courageous and determined actions by Fiat Chrysler workers earlier this week created panic in the corporate boardrooms and in the establishment media, which tried to black out all news of what happened, presenting the suspension of some automobile production as an altruistic act by management, at the insistence of the UAW, which was motivated by concern over workers’ health and safety.

The walkouts this week were preceded last week by a partial shutdown at FCA Windsor Assembly. “[Neither the] unions nor FCA shut us down,” said one Windsor Assembly worker. “We are human beings, but that’s not a consideration, only the dollar. Our health is number one!”

Other North American autoworkers expressed the same sentiment.

A Toyota worker in Canada wrote to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, “We have two plants [in Canada] and one has had a confirmed case of virus. The company didn’t shut things right down and the employees, I believe, weren’t told right away, except ones who may have had close contact were sent home right away.

“They did, however, when it all came to light, send the late shift home at 11pm, but resumed as normal the following morning. Both plants were to deep clean

March 23–24 and resume after that, but due to, I believe, online scrutiny, not only from team members, they will shutdown until April 6.

“They were going to keep running, unlike the Big 3. I suppose that may have been a contributing factor as well. People had walked out this week, but being told by HR they would be docked a sick-day. They don’t give a shit about their employees it’s all about the dollar!”

A Tesla worker told local media: “Why are we still open, exposing these people potentially to the coronavirus? It doesn’t make sense to me at all.

“I have co-workers who are pregnant. I have co-workers who are over 65. They are fearful. They don’t know what to do anymore.”

While production workers at Fiat Chrysler’s Jefferson North Assembly Plant have been sent home, the company has asked maintenance workers to report for work or be placed on indefinite layoff. A worker at Jefferson North told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “Nobody has any solid information of what’s going on.”

Noting that maintenance workers were still on the job, he said, “It totally flies in the face of what FCA had told the local news channels is that they’re shutting down all of North America, that does not seem to be the case. They’re trying to show themselves in a better light while keeping their employees in the dark of what’s going on, they’re telling the people what the people wants to hear.

“The thing that bothers me most, it’s not like there’s going to be a huge run on buying new vehicles when most of America is shut down, so that leads me to believe is they just want a huge stockpile so they can lay us off indefinitely in the near future until things calm down.”

Despite the shutdown of major assembly plants workers have reported that many if not most auto parts supplier plants are still operating. A worker from Ventra Plastics in Grand Rapids, Michigan, wrote, “They refused to even address [the] nationwide crisis that is happening and would not give us answers if we would get points for calling in due to [having] no child care after [the] schools in our district were suspended until April 6.

“When we asked our human resources if we would be terminated their reply was, ‘just do what is best for you

and your family.’ Meanwhile major retailers who profit as much as these major car companies are paying their workers full wages, we barely got a 8 hour notice of shutdown today march 19 because of the Detroit plant shutdowns.

“This shutdown came with a unemployment paper and a march 30th return date and no other compensation. We were previously told that if Detroit and Canada didn’t shut down we wouldn’t either.

“It’s very degrading to humanity how money hungry these companies are. They didn’t even have the decency to have enough hand sanitizer for our whole plant or take more actual safety/health measures. These are the worst companies to work for. We have to keep revealing the truth about these companies to maybe one day see change.”



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