

In criminal pursuit of profits, Tesla CEO Elon Musk restarts production at California facility

Evan Blake
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In open defiance of local public health authorities, Tesla CEO Elon Musk unilaterally restarted production Monday at the company's sole US assembly facility in Fremont, California, which employs roughly 10,000 workers. Local media reports indicate that the facility's parking lot was as full as a normal workday Monday, meaning that thousands of workers congregated throughout the day, dramatically increasing the likelihood of the spread of COVID-19 throughout the region.

Announcing the reopening of the Tesla facility Monday, Musk brazenly tweeted: "Tesla is restarting production today against Alameda County rules. I will be on the line with everyone else. If anyone is arrested, I ask that it only be me."

Musk's actions are criminal on multiple levels. While directly violating local shelter-in-place laws, he is deliberately endangering the lives of Tesla workers at the facility, solely for the purpose of boosting profits for himself and the company's shareholders. Further, this unsafe resumption of production at the largest manufacturing facility in the San Francisco Bay Area region will create the conditions for a rapid increase in the number of cases and deaths in the coming weeks.

Last week, Alameda County officials, along with five other counties in the Bay Area, extended the region's shelter-in-place orders until May 31. This prompted Musk to denounce the decision and threaten over the weekend that he would withdraw Tesla's operations from California and move to Texas or Nevada. The company also filed a lawsuit in federal court Saturday to try to sanction their unsafe reopening.

With a net worth of \$40.1 billion, Musk is the 22nd richest person in the world. He has accrued \$12.6

billion since the start of this year and has become increasingly unhinged in his relentless pursuit of wealth. With his lawless and homicidal action, Musk has given open expression to the instinctive profit motive driving every capitalist.

The move to restart production at Tesla is directly bound up with the broader reopening of the global auto industry, which has vastly accelerated over the past week. All of Tesla's major competitors are working to resume production, with numerous auto parts plants across Michigan also reopening yesterday. Despite Tesla posting a relatively good earnings report at the end of April, the company is under enormous pressure not to cede any of its advantage in the expanding electric vehicle market.

In an email sent to workers Monday titled, "Furlough Has Ended And We Are Back To Work in Production!" Tesla management wrote to its workforce, "We're happy to get back to work and have implemented very detailed plans to help you keep safe as you return."

Tesla workers know full well that they face deadly working conditions, and that the COVID-19 pandemic is nowhere near subsiding. But the economic pressures are so intense that they are effectively being forced against their will to return to work, as any worker that refuses to return faces the prospect of being fired and cut off from accessing unemployment benefits. Since mid-March, over 4.5 million Californians have officially filed for unemployment, or roughly 23.3 percent of the state's workforce.

Throughout the pandemic, Musk has continuously tweeted his opposition to the statewide shelter-in-place measures implemented by California's Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom. His tweets have

corresponded closely with those of Trump in demanding a reopening of businesses at no matter what cost. He has denounced the issuing of stimulus checks to workers, praised the possibilities of chloroquine for treating COVID-19, and decried social distancing measures as “fascist” attacks on democratic rights.

On April 28, he tweeted, “FREE AMERICA NOW.” In another tweet from April, he advanced the homicidal conceptions about “herd immunity” promoted by politicians globally demanding that millions become infected and die, and he has repeatedly promoted conspiracy theories claiming that the mortality rate for COVID-19 is actually low.

Despite his apparent hostility towards Newsom, the two spoke over the past week, with Newsom crediting Musk with prompting him to implement plans to begin reopening manufacturing across the state last week. At his daily press conference Monday, Newsom stated, “I have not only known that company but I have known its founder for many, many years.” He added glowingly, “I have great reverence for their technology, for their innovative spirit, for their leadership.”

Shortly after Monday’s press conference, Musk posted his tweet on the reopening of Tesla. In all likelihood, a deal will soon be struck between Musk and local officials, with Newsom serving as intermediary, to ensure the continued functioning of Tesla with nothing more than a fine for Musk.

Prior to the pandemic, Tesla had already gained the reputation of being one of the most unsafe workplaces in the US. In 2018, the company made the “Dirty Dozen” list put out by the National Council for Occupational Health and Safety (COSH), ranking them among the most dangerous work environments in the country.

The report noted, “Recordable injuries for workers at Tesla Motors were 31 percent higher than for the rest of the automotive industry in 2015 and 2016. [...] The rate of serious injuries among Tesla workers, requiring days away from work, restricted duty or job transfer, was also much higher at Tesla than at other auto factories: more than double the industry average in 2015 and 83 percent higher in 2016.”

The brutal sweatshop in Fremont is now on course to become a literal deathtrap for thousands of workers, and the epicenter of the contagion throughout the region. The deranged decision by Musk to prematurely

restart production fully exposes the irrationality of the capitalist system, which is based on private ownership of the means of production and the subordination of social needs to private profit.

Tesla workers must act immediately to form rank-and-file safety committees, to halt this non-essential production and ensure that the health of workers takes precedence over corporate profits. These committees must assert the collective will of the workers and fight to take control of production from Musk and the wealthy shareholders that are sending workers to die.

Such a struggle will only be successful to the extent that workers broaden their reach as widely as possible, linking up with autoworkers and all those being sent back to work under deadly conditions, across the US and internationally. The aim must be to shut down all non-essential industry, seize the wealth of the corporate executives and financial aristocracy, and ensure that all workers and their families are provided for and kept safe for the duration of the pandemic. To achieve these necessary aims will require a frontal assault on the entire capitalist system, and the socialist reorganization of society in the interests of the working class.



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