

“The system is suffocating the life out of the working class”

Autoworkers denounce police murder of George Floyd, express support for protesters

Our reporters
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Autoworkers in Detroit, Michigan and Kokomo, Indiana denounced the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and expressed support for the tens of thousands of young people of all races who were protesting against police violence across the country. The workers rejected efforts to brand the protesters as “violent” and said the real violence was being perpetrated by police and National Guard troops dispatched by state and local officials and incited by President Trump.

“It’s very upsetting to me that the mainstream media focuses on race, when it is very clear that the demonstrators are black, white, multiracial,” said a worker at Fiat Chrysler’s Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in suburban Detroit. “I was moved to see the video of the Amish people protesting the murder of George Floyd. The media is also focusing on the violence, much of which is caused by police provocateurs and plants. Sure, there are some ordinary people looting, too, but there is a lot be angry about,” he said.

“To see a man suffocated in broad daylight and knowing the video you’re watching was taken by a 17-year-old girl says a lot about America,” he continued. “To give a panoramic view of the situation, as an autoworker I feel like we all have a knee on our necks because we are forced to return to work in the middle of the pandemic. I’m working 10 hours a day, wearing a mask that makes me dizzy. I’m forced to choose between my health and a paycheck. We are treated like cattle. I feel paranoid. Who might have the virus? Is the air conditioning circulating the virus? There were three more confirmed COVID cases at the plant before we all returned. At least four SHAP

workers have already died.”

The police murder of Floyd, the worker said, was part of a whole series of measures taken by the Trump administration and the government to deprive workers of their basic rights, including the right to live. “The government and the corporations are oblivious to the safety and lives of workers. The back-to-work order puts profits over life. When I see what has happened to the meatpackers, that to me is the same thing as a cop pressing his knee on George Floyd. The system is suffocating the life out of the working class.

“I feel the same way when I see children being taken from their families. There are immigrants in detention centers, and children covered with aluminum blankets. The way the entire pandemic is being handled is also criminal,” he said.

“It’s like we’re in a Third World country. And what do the Oprah Winfreys and Tyler Perrys have to say? They’re very wealthy, and they say, ‘Calm down.’ It’s not about race, it’s class. I can see why it is that the ruling class sees a threat if the working class in its entirety, globally is united. The ruling class does not want the merging of the working class.”

An autoworker at Fiat Chrysler’s Kokomo Transmission plant also spoke in support of the protests and the need for workers to organize a fight for safe working conditions. “I believe George Floyd’s murder has ignited something. The protests are happening all over the world now. His name will be remembered in history. Enough is enough. I can’t imagine how his family feels. The police have been doing this to people of every skin color. Now it is on video, and we’re able to see it. In every situation, police escalate to violence, and nothing ever happens to these cops. People are so

sick and tired of the government lying to them.

"Politicians are sharing false information about the coronavirus in order to reopen states. People are not idiots, like the government seems to think we are.

"We need to fight to show the public the conditions in these plants. Neither of the plants I worked at had hot water, and we'd run out of gloves all the time. They made us use recycled gloves, which were sent off somewhere when we were done with them to be cleaned, but they would come back in bad condition. One woman at Chrysler cut herself because a piece of metal was in the gloves. There is no way that you're ever six feet away from anyone on those lines. You could reach out and touch someone on the sub-assembly line, for example.

"When someone goes into the plants when the virus is going around, that person could bring it home to their loved ones. Chrysler has an abundance of transmissions in their warehouses, so I don't understand the point of putting people in the plants where they risk their lives and their families' lives. They have enough stored up for us not to need to work for at least three months."

On the question of Democratic and Republican politicians across the US deploying the National Guard against protesters, she responded, "Why didn't these governors call the National Guard in when white supremacists with guns protested at the state capitols? Why were they allowed to act violently and maliciously, but they're going to send the National Guard to shoot protesters who are against violence? If they send troops, they're going to shoot them. Isn't violence the only thing the American government has shown the world? I'm tired of the Democrats and Republicans."

She continued, "What the union does is criminal. The UAW has divided workers in the plants. They take money from us, they do nothing with it but pocket it. Why aren't union safety reps being held accountable? They're spending thousands of dollars to send them to classes to learn safety and health. And the medical unit at Chrysler is a joke. It's a band-aid clinic, which is just there so OSHA doesn't come in."

The worker responded to the call for workers to build rank-and-file committees to oversee safety and health in the plants and for the working class to advance its own answer to social inequality, police violence and other attacks on democratic and social rights. "It needs

to be done. We need to organize to fight and stop what's going on. The plants have always been places where people got hurt and died. People should be able to go to work and not be harassed for speaking out when they see that things are not safe. The economy is going in two ways: either you're rich or you're poor. The people protesting are fighting for humanity, fighting for survival, for us to be one and not be defined by gender or race."

Another SHAP worker added, "The police are riling things up, coming in full blast, guns blazing and firing tear gas at protesters. On social media you can see police moles breaking windows and stirring up things. The police are even firing rubber bullets at reporters, and a whole camera team got arrested in Minneapolis.

"I've known about the way the police operate since Rodney King in LA. They do what they want and feel they can get away with it. Usually after beating or killing someone, they get put on administrative leave and get away with it. But what the cop did to Floyd was caught on video, and everybody is coming together, black and white, to demand justice.

"People are getting together, exchanging numbers, using social media and groups are being created to speak out more than ever. There were protests in England and even in Iran. This is very vast. What the police are doing now, trying to put down a lot of people, is even larger than a single murder. It sheds light on the whole imbalance in society. The working class has to come together, that would be the most powerful way to fight police killings, unemployment and all the issues workers face."



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