

Expand autoworkers' struggle to stop the coronavirus and save lives! Form rank-and-file safety committees!

The Jefferson North Rank-and-File Safety Committee
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The following statement was produced by the Jefferson North Rank-and-File Safety Committee (jnapsafety@gmail.com). The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter will assist auto workers and other workers in establishing safety committees. Email the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter at autoworkers@wsws.org.

Autoworkers at Fiat Chrysler's Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit are taking a stand to defend our lives and the lives of our families.

On Thursday morning, workers on A crew protested and shut down the line after new cases of COVID-19 were reported in the plant. Later that day, B crew also refused to work until early Friday morning, when management and United Auto Workers officials forced some to start production up again.

But the next shift, C crew, also refused to work around 3:30 a.m. Friday morning, and workers continued to stop the line throughout Friday.

Workers took these actions because we don't feel safe! Neither management nor the UAW is giving us real information about the spread of the coronavirus in our plants.

The return to work last month was totally premature. Our brothers and sisters had already suffered the consequences from the companies and the union delaying a shutdown till mid-March, with dozens of autoworkers dying from COVID-19. If we hadn't taken action then to force them to stop production, how many more would have died?

The pandemic wasn't under control when they brought us back to work, and now record daily cases are being reported in the US. Record numbers of deaths every day are inevitably going to come unless something is done.

The only concern of the auto companies and the union has been to get production running again and make sure

the investors keep making profits and the corporate debts are paid, no matter how many of us get sick and die.

Everything they said about our "safety being the top priority" was a lie. We can't properly social distance on the line or during shift changes, the plant isn't being cleaned enough, they don't shut down for a day after cases are confirmed, there isn't enough hand sanitizer or disinfectant, and the heat and the physical demands of the job make wearing PPE almost unbearable.

Many autoworkers have taken leave or stayed home in order to avoid exposing themselves to the virus in the plants. But the companies are quickly hiring super-exploited temporary workers in order to make up the shortfall.

Because the companies and the UAW continue to force us into unsafe conditions, our committee puts forth the following demands:

1. Workers must be immediately notified of any cases of COVID-19 and what areas were affected. This information cannot be kept secret from workers.
2. When there's a case confirmed, the factory should be closed for 24 hours for deep cleaning, not just the affected area, but the whole plant. Preventative maintenance is needed to ensure a safe and comfortable working environment.
3. Social distancing must be implemented when entering and leaving the plant and during bathroom, lunch and other break times.
4. The line must be stopped for 10 minutes every hour to enable workers to take off their masks, rest and cool off.
5. Workers must have regular, universal testing.

Temperature checks and self-reporting symptoms are not enough.

6. If conditions are not safe, workers have the right to refuse to work without threat of retaliation by management and the union.

The Jefferson North Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls on all autoworkers and workers everywhere: If necessary, stop production. We have the right to a safe environment and to not bring home this disease to our loved ones. We are due that.

There is plenty of money and resources to ensure our safety and fight the pandemic. The government has handed over billions to the companies, and trillions are being given to corporate America as a whole. This money must not be squandered on the rich. It must be redirected to meeting the needs and safety of workers.

The problems and dangers we face at JNAP are not unique to our plant. New coronavirus cases continue to be reported at Ford, GM and the auto parts plants, and at the meatpacking and food processing plants, Amazon and elsewhere.

All workers should have an environment where health is the priority. We must not be kept in the dark about a virus that could potentially kill us. After a hard day of work, we have the right to come home in one piece, not sick, not hurting.

We know the UAW won't do anything to protect us. All they do is take our money—and take bribes from the companies—and support whatever management wants. No one's going to protect us but ourselves.

We've begun this action, but now we need the support of autoworkers and other workers everywhere. Join us and expand this struggle: Share this statement. Raise our demands. Form a rank-and-file safety committee at your plant and connect with ours.

Our health must not be jeopardized for corporate profits. We all have to unite and stand up for our safety and that of our families!



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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