

Hands off Fiat Chrysler workers fighting the COVID-19 disease!

The Jefferson North and Sterling Heights Rank-and-File Safety Committees
1 July 2020

The following statement was issued by the Jefferson North and Sterling Heights Rank-and-File Safety Committees, which were set up by Detroit area Fiat Chrysler workers to fight for safe conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The WSWs Autoworker Newsletter will assist autoworkers and other workers in establishing safety committees. Email us at autoworkers@wsws.org.

The Jefferson North and Sterling Heights Rank-and-File Safety Committees denounce the outrageous effort by Fiat Chrysler and the UAW to intimidate and silence workers by threatening to fire anyone involved in work stoppages to protect themselves against COVID-19.

On Monday, managers at FCA plants across the US read out a letter from Mike Resha, head of FCA North American manufacturing, who declared such job actions “would not be tolerated.” FCA, the letter warned, “will investigate any unauthorized work stoppage and will appropriately, immediately and decisively act on the employee that was found to have unnecessarily instigated such activities.”

These threats say more about the company’s attitude toward workers’ safety than all the PR press releases about “putting safety first.” If the plants were really safe, FCA would not be threatening to fire workers who are trying to protect their lives and their families against this deadly disease. Management is retaliating because workers at JNAP and SHAP dared to stop production last week to demand safe conditions.

The plants are not safe and should never have been reopened. This life-threatening virus is spreading like wildfire, especially in large workplaces. Our factories are like cities inside of cities and it is impossible for thousands of workers to social distance. We have already lost at least 26 autoworkers from COVID-19, including Sylvia Hammock, Jerry Hayes and Ricardo

Smith at SHAP. How many more fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers must die?

If the UAW was supporting us, we would be in our homes right now. But the UAW has been bribed by the corporations. The overall message from both FCA and the UAW is: “Build these trucks, they are more important than your lives.”

But we are not slaves and we will not be intimidated. That is why workers at JNAP and SHAP have set up rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the UAW and the company, to fight for our best interests.

Our committees have six 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.

If a worker can be fired for refusing to work under deadly conditions, it could happen to anyone. Our committees uphold the once well-known principle that “an injury to one is an injury to all.” Workers have the

right to take collective action against management retaliation. If a worker is victimized for standing up against unsafe conditions, then all workers should halt production until he or she gets their job back.

This is not just a struggle against Fiat Chrysler. The whole working class is in this fight, whether you work at Target, Starbucks, Walmart or Amazon, or whether you build cars for Ford, VW, Toyota or any other global corporation around the world. This pandemic doesn't care what race or nationality you are. The corporations and the governments all over the world are trying to force workers into unsafe conditions, in order to keep producing their profits.

Workers cannot and will not accept this immoral choice between working and dying or being unemployed and starving. The banks and corporations that have gotten trillions in government bailouts have more than enough money piled up to provide a secure income for non-essential workers to remain home, and to provide PPE and safe working conditions for essential workers.

Our stand taken at JNAP and SHAP is part of a growing movement of workers in the US and around the world to fight the pandemic. We urge all workers to form rank-and-file safety committees in your factories and workplaces in order to unite the struggle of all workers. We cannot rely on someone else to give us what we need. We have to stand up for our rights and make sure we get what we need.



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