

“Workers must stand up and say, ‘Enough is enough’”

Toledo Jeep Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls for emergency measures as COVID-19 surges in the plant

Shannon Jones
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Workers at the Fiat Chrysler Toledo Assembly Complex are calling for emergency action as reports continue of high rates of COVID-19 infection at the plant in northwestern Ohio, which builds popular Jeep brand vehicles.

In the face of mounting concerns among workers, both management and the United Auto Workers are continuing their policy of covering up COVID cases. The refusal to indicate the number and location of infections makes proper cleaning, quarantine and contact tracing impossible, guaranteeing the further spread of the deadly disease.

According to sources at the Jeep plant, as many as 75 workers have tested positive for COVID-19 or are awaiting test results. Due to the information blackout, workers are only finding out about new cases through social media or word of mouth.

A member of the Toledo Jeep Rank-and-File Safety Committee told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* that emergency measures are called for to deal with conditions in the plant. “The situation is serious. We should shut down for two and a half weeks and clean the entire plant with a specially trained crew.

“When we come back, everyone should be tested before entering the plant,” he said.

Fiat Chrysler is reportedly hiring additional temporary employees to fill manpower shortages. Jeep workers report that supplementary temporary workers are being forced to work on Sundays and to fill in for positions at areas outside their department, in apparent violation of the labor agreement, the Toledo worker said.

Behind this drive to increase production at whatever cost lie the insatiable demands of Wall Street financiers.

All the major automakers have taken on massive new additional debt to deal with the sudden drop in sales and income. Fiat Chrysler is expected to report a \$2.3 billion second-quarter loss Friday. Losses reported by General Motors and Ford this week were substantial, but smaller than initially projected due to aggressive cost-cutting measures backed by the UAW.

Another Toledo Jeep worker told the *Autoworker Newsletter* that “management and the UAW aren’t saying anything. Workers who show symptoms are being given a test, an oral swab, but from what I have been able to find, those are the least accurate tests out there. One person said it took them a week to get results.

“One worker was sent home with symptoms, but they wouldn’t clean his work area because they said they didn’t have a hard copy confirming he was being tested,” the worker said.

Basic safety protocols were going by the wayside in the drive to maintain high levels of production, the worker said. In one case, he added, a worker who had tested positive for COVID-19 had been allowed to work for two days after his test results came in.

The pandemic is ravaging Ohio as it surges across the US. On Wednesday, data from the Ohio Hospital Association (OHA) showed that 1,122 COVID-positive patients were being treated in Ohio hospitals as of Tuesday, the highest number since the start of the pandemic. Of those, 348 patients were in intensive care units and 174 were on a ventilator. Statewide there were 1,396 new cases and 40 new deaths reported on Wednesday. There have been 3,422 deaths statewide since the start of the pandemic.

The auto companies are looking for whatever means

available to force workers back into the plants. In an apparent act of desperation, UAW President Rory Gamble, in comments to the *Detroit Free Press* last week, sought to discourage workers from taking early retirement, essentially telling workers, many of whom are vulnerable because of preexisting conditions, to imperil their lives for corporate profit. Intense economic pressure is being exerted to force workers back to assembly lines with the refusal of Congress to extend the \$600 weekly supplement to unemployment benefits that workers have called a “lifeline.”

On Thursday, a leaked memo from Honda revealed that due to COVID-related manpower shortages it was forcing front-office and administrative staff onto production lines at its Marysville, Ohio facility. Over 4,000 work at the plant, which builds the popular Accord and Acura models.

A post in the online news journal *Patch* reported that workers at the Ford Avon Lake plant outside Cleveland were being forced to work under unsafe conditions and that COVID-19 cases at the facility were “doubling by the day.” A local health official denied the report. However, Lorain County Public Health Commissioner David Covell acknowledged that four employees at the plant had tested positive for COVID-19 and others had been placed in quarantine.

There have been recent deaths reported among auto parts workers in Michigan, including one death at the Battle Creek Denso thermal manufacturing plant and a suspected COVID death of a worker at the Faurecia plant in Saline.

There have been large numbers of cases reported at the General Motors Wentzville, Missouri plant, the Arlington, Texas facility as well as Tesla in Fremont, California. GM has been forced to bring in workers from Michigan and Tennessee to staff the Wentzville plant due to high absentee rates. Despite this, auto companies are attempting to further expand production, with GM announcing Thursday that it is planning a production increase at its Fort Wayne, Indiana Assembly plant.

Workers at Fort Wayne’s sister plant in Silao, Mexico say that seven workers have died at the GM plant, as part of the horrific tragedy in Mexico, which, with 46,000 fatalities, now has the third largest COVID-19 death toll in the world.

A worker at the FCA transmission plant in Tipton, Indiana wrote to the *Autoworker Newsletter*: “Hey please help us, we have people testing positive left and right inside the Tipton plant in day shift and second shift and hazmat people is inside right now in full containment suits

with chemicals strapped to their backs and the company and union will not shut the plant down. We are being told it’s ok because we are wearing masks. It’s just unbelievable, we are out of options we have nobody to turn to for help.”

Autoworkers at the Toledo Jeep plant have joined workers at the Jefferson North Assembly plant and the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in launching a rank-and-file safety committee to fight back against the UAW-management conspiracy to suppress information on the spread of COVID-19 and enforce the policy of production before health and safety. These committees have pledged to fight for safe working conditions and issued demands for basic safety measures such as universal testing, notification of cases and ten-minute rest breaks every hour to rest and cool off.

The Toledo Jeep worker said: “We have to stand up for each other, not the UAW or the company. If we don’t look out for each other, who is going to look out for us? We have to fight this ourselves. Everyone in the plants. We as workers need to be taken seriously. We are not just robots or machines.

“We need all the necessary information to protect our health and safety. Management doesn’t care, and we are sick of it. We need to be treated like actual human beings. Workers need to organize their own safety committees. That is the only means for defending ourselves.”

He added that autoworkers needed to stand in solidarity with teachers who are being ordered back into classrooms as the virus rampages across wide areas of the US. “There needs to be a nationwide teachers strike over this. There should be a full democratic vote to strike over safety. They are trying to say that the transmission rate from child to teacher is very low. That is not true.

“We need a worldwide movement. Workers must stand up and say, ‘Enough is enough.’”



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