

Honda orders office workers at Marysville, Ohio plant to man assembly lines as COVID-19 spreads

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Some office workers at Honda's auto manufacturing plant in Marysville, Ohio, are being forced to work on assembly lines due to staff shortages related to COVID-19, according to local news station WOSU.

The workers being sent to the assembly lines are rank-and-file clerical workers from accounting, purchasing, and research and development departments. According to information given to WOSU by an anonymous worker, Honda management began bringing office workers to the shop floor voluntarily but then required a certain number of workers from each department to report to the assembly lines.

One reason for the shortage of assembly line workers is the spread of coronavirus, although the exact number of positive cases among Honda workers is unknown. Since the auto industry restarted production in the US in May, Honda, like other automakers, has not provided any information about COVID cases at its facilities. There is an ongoing surge of COVID-19 cases in Ohio, with a rolling 21-day average of 1,307 infections and 43 deaths.

An email sent to office clericals by an unnamed plant general manager said the need for office staff to work the lines was that "many employees being on leave due to contracting COVID-19 or quarantining after exposure."

An office worker who was called to work on the assembly line in Marysville spoke to the WOSU news outlet anonymously for fear of retaliation for expressing his concerns and has since been quoted repeatedly by local press outlets.

"I was not very happy about that because I've really tried hard to socially distance and keep away from other people during this...So I felt like being forced to go in to the floor where I know people have had COVID and tested positive for it, I felt very uncomfortable with that."

He said that workers were concerned about improper

training, explaining that they were not trained until showing up to the assembly lines. He said they were also concerned about the increased risk of contracting COVID-19 due to close contact with other workers, estimating that "each time a worker on the assembly line gets sick, they have been in contact with more than 40 other workers."

Like autoworkers at the US-based Big Three plants across the US, workers at Honda and other foreign-based auto factories work under conditions where the virus can easily spread. Plants have poor ventilation and workers are crowded shoulder-to-shoulder on some assembly lines in various parts of the plant.

Workers at other auto plants throughout the US report that the same measures are being employed across the industry to maintain profit levels. "Happening often at several places I've worked including my current employer...which is a UAW shop...manpower shortage and supply requirements for Jeep keep things running regardless of who's running the floor," a Fiat Chrysler Jeep worker wrote on Facebook in response to a post about the situation at Honda Marysville.

One reason that manufacturing plants have utilized office workers to keep assembly lines running historically is to force them to act as strikebreakers when workers have taken action against corporations during contract negotiations. "When I worked in a plant office at the Timken Co., the male office workers worked on the plant floor getting orders ready to ship following the union workers strike," a nurse wrote on Facebook after seeing the news report about Honda office workers.

The Marysville Honda plant was the first foreign-based auto plant to open in the US in 1982, where it began production of the Honda Accord sedan. Today workers in the factory assemble its highly profitable Accord and CR-

V SUV models as well as its premium line of Acura models.

Its highly exploited workers assemble the cars, which sell from anywhere between \$24,000 and \$149,000, for starting wages at the poverty level of \$16-21 per hour. The company began running ads on social media on July 31 for full-time production assembly positions at its Marysville and East Liberty, Ohio, plants with the promise of a meager \$100 monthly attendance bonus for workers willing to risk their health and safety and the health and safety of their families.

In contrast, Honda Motor Company reported \$6.96 billion in gross profit globally for the first quarter of 2020, despite global production disruptions worldwide. Its US operations shut down in March, following the independent actions of US and Canadian autoworkers to protest unsafe working conditions in defiance of the unions and company management.

In response to the announcement of the use of office workers to fulfill assembly jobs at Marysville, United Auto Workers spokesman Brian Rothenberg claimed that office workers at the Detroit auto companies would never be pulled to work on the factory floor, a claim which has no merit.

His statements reflected an attempt to sell the services of the UAW to the corporations. "First, we have unionized temp workers to fill in," in reference to the reserve army of super-exploited temporary and supplemental workers, who are paid below full-time wages and receive few benefits, a position which the UAW helped to implement in contracts it signed after the 2009 restructuring of the US auto industry and maintained in subsequent concessions contracts.

He also referred to the reserves of unemployed auto workers that the UAW would help force back into unsafe conditions using economic blackmail. "And if there's not enough of those, other people who are laid off from the nearby area, and then a larger area, and then a larger area, and call them back to work."

In reality, conditions would be no better for Honda workers if the UAW were present in the plant. In UAW plants, safety conditions are just as bad, in spite of the UAW's joint labor-management promotion of bogus safety measures. As a result, workers have begun to form rank-and-file safety committees in opposition to the unions and company management.

At plants like Ford's Dearborn, Michigan Truck Plant and Fiat Chrysler's Jefferson North Assembly Plant, starting wages for workers are as low as those at Honda in

Marysville.

In 2003 workers at Marysville Honda rejected representation by the UAW, which was unable to convince the needed 65 percent of workers at the plant to sign cards in support of unionization. The rejection of the UAW by rank-and-file Honda workers is a reflection of a rightful distrust in the unions after decades of betrayals.

The UAW systematically isolates sections of workers from different plants in order to suppress any attempt by workers to unite in an independent, organized manner to oppose unsafe working conditions.

In contrast to the efforts of corporate management to divide the working class, many workers realize that the restructuring of the economy brought on by the pandemic has brought previously isolated sections of the working class closer to one another in terms of their conditions.

One worker wrote in response to the report on Honda, "I'm a chemist. I worked for plants, in plants, and on plant trials, though my main job was in a central laboratory. We used to scramble to help plants with upsets, including on weekends and late nights. I get it. I'm going to guess that some office workers are married to production workers, and the work-from-home partner has been handling child-care up until now. They could now both be in a bind."

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party call on all workers to form rank-and-file safety committees to fight back against unsafe working conditions and for the right to a safe and comfortable workplace. This includes not just autoworkers but teachers and other school employees who are facing a reckless drive by the political establishment to force the reopening of schools in the midst of the pandemic. This is a crucial component of the deadly back to work campaign by big business, which want children in the classroom so their parents will be free to return to the plants and offices, warehouses and transportation hubs.

We urge autoworkers who want to learn more about building rank-and-file safety committees to contact the WSWWS Autoworker Newsletter.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)