

“They have a multi-billion dollar corporation, and they work us to death”

Indiana Faurecia workers denounce unsafe conditions, forced overtime

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COVID-19 continues to rage unchecked through the vast network of parts plants that supply the auto industry in North America. Workers confront not only the deadly virus, but also a sinister conspiracy of silence enforced by the companies and the unions that prevents them from knowing where the contagion strikes.

A worker at the Faurecia factory in Columbus, Indiana, 45 miles south of the state capital Indianapolis, reported to the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* that a member of the cleaning crew responsible for maintaining sanitation at the facility had likely tested positive over the weekend and been sent home to quarantine for two weeks. The worst part is that workers in the plant are told nothing, and the company does next to nothing to protect them from infection. Production never stops.

“Nobody told us anything,” he said. “The plant wouldn’t tell us. So we had to find out about the virus by word of mouth.”

The Autoworker Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network, which has been organized to unify workers independently of the unions and the companies in opposition to the dangerous return to work, issued a statement on Monday, “Workers have a right to know about COVID-19 in their plants!” “Auto workers are being deprived of the most basic information about the spread of COVID-19 in their plants and workplaces,” it states. “We know the coronavirus is spreading in the factories, and the so-called safety measures aren’t stopping it. We see workers get sick on the line. We share what little information we can get using social

media and word-of-mouth.”

“A couple dozen people at our plant that I know of have had the coronavirus,” the worker related. “Faurecia just doesn’t care. A lot of people have gotten hurt and are still getting hurt. OSHA [the Occupational Safety and Health Administration] has told them no, but Faurecia expects us to lift fixtures that weigh anywhere from 25 to 50 pounds. If you get hurt, Faurecia insists that they are not responsible.”

The company has exploited the COVID-19 crisis to intensify the pressure on workers and the rate of their exploitation. “They laid off 50 people permanently and did not bring back over 200 others. Still they expect the same production from those of us that are left. They are basically asking for people to hurt themselves.”

At the end of March, the CARES Act passed unanimously by the Democrats and Republicans pumped \$3 trillion into the stock market to support the market valuations of the major corporations and the accounts of the financial aristocracy who hold most of their shares.

“The government gave [Faurecia] money to keep employees, not to lay them off. Out of 200 lines they kept 22 running and those of us that were left had to work nonstop 12 hours a day, seven days a week. Faurecia put our families and everybody else at risk. They are really working us until we die. They do not care. They put on a big front, ‘We are for family.’ I know a dozen families that have split up because of that place. They literally do not give anybody time to do anything with their family.

“A lot of people can’t afford not to work, but they

are forcing them to work 72 to 84 hours a week. The union does not help. It's the IBEW [the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers].

"I don't even have time off on Sunday. They said, 'That's not our problem.' I think it's a crime. We are grossly understaffed. They did not bring back over 200 people. It is tearing people apart, literally."

The medical staff is a sham, the worker said. They are not there to care for the workers; on the contrary, they protect the company from the financial liability of inflicting physical damage on the workers. A young woman collapsed in the plant from heat exhaustion and the company doctors told her that it was the result of a pre-existing medical condition.

"My heart goes out to the workers in Mexico," he said. "I heard about the death of a worker at a Faurecia plant there. They just moved the body to the side and never stopped the line. They are playing God."

"A woman in my plant had her shoulder pulled out of the socket. Her husband was working the same shift. They made her wait until the shift was over so that he could take her to the hospital. HR tried to lie to OSHA. But they had signed statements from witnesses. The company did get fined but not enough to bother Faurecia. Three thousand dollars is not much to them. What about her and her suffering?"

The fines OSHA does issue represent pocket change for a multi-billion dollar corporation which can appeal the fines and have them dropped anyway. There have been roughly 40,000 complaints of unsafe conditions during the COVID-19 crisis and, as of last week, only four citations have been issued by OSHA. Those will likely be appealed and reduced or dropped altogether.

"It is criminal the way they treat people. And they are getting away with it. Our manager comes in the plant thumping his chest, saying we are a multi-billion dollar company worldwide. They are getting rid of people, running 12 hour shifts seven days a week, so instead of having four people to insure, they can cut it down to two."

With 122,000 employees in 2019, Faurecia was the ninth-largest automotive parts manufacturer in the world and the number one for vehicle interiors and emission control equipment, with €17.8 billion (\$20.9 billion) in sales in 2019. One in three automobiles is equipped by Faurecia, and the transnational auto giant PSA Group, set to merge with Fiat Chrysler, owns a

majority stake in the company.

"People are telling me they are so tired they're starting to fall asleep on the way to work. When I was driving home the other day I had to get out of my car. I was just so exhausted. These are horrendous conditions that we are working under. They have a multi-billion-dollar corporation, and they work us to death."

Another worker described the brutal process of harassment the company uses to force workers who have been injured to quit.

"I had fallen and they kept giving me harder and harder jobs to do," he said. "They knew this one supervisor harassed me. He even came by my house and followed me around inside the plant. I told him to stop following me. A bunch of people quit. It is brutal. I have been through a lot. They hounded me, they were horrible to me."

"They could get more parts if they took away the lift assist. So they took it away even though it was backbreaking lifting those parts all day. It's a nightmare. They took all the fans away."

"We know that Faurecia treated people poorly in different plants and in different countries. Once they used you up they want you to leave on your own. Once they've used up your physical ability and your psychological ability, then you're worthless to them."

"The president of the local union admitted that he was behind me getting fired. He was a bully toward me in the interest of the company."



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