

# Indiana Rank-and-File Safety Committee demands reinstatement of whistleblower at Faurecia Gladstone plant

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The recently-launched Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee is demanding the immediate rehiring of a whistleblower in the south central Indiana plant. James Grady was falsely accused by the company of trying to infect his coworkers with COVID-19 and wrongfully terminated in mid-May.

The Committee demands the immediate reinstatement of James Grady with full back pay and the cessation of all wrongful firings and other forms of intimidation which are employed by the multi-billion-dollar corporation to enforce a reign of terror on the shop floor here and elsewhere.

A member of the committee told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* that, contrary to the company's allegations, Grady was following the specific instructions of the director of Human Resources at the company and the local union president who had told him to return to work on the day in question. Grady has filed a complaint for wrongful termination.

Management at the plant routinely drives workers to the point of exhaustion. In March, as the coronavirus first began to rip through the United States, the company laid off over 200 people via text message. But production never slowed down, and workers are frequently forced to pull 12-hour days, seven days per week. Grady is well known in the plant as a fighter against company intimidation and for the health, safety and welfare of all the workers there during his ten-year tenure.

He recently spoke to the *Autoworker Newsletter* to explain his case and describe the company's systematic intimidation and violations of safe work practices, enforced with the collusion of the International

Brotherhood of Electrical Workers union (IBEW).

In late April, Grady says, he and his family got tested after his girlfriend's father had tested positive for COVID-19. On May 5, his test came back positive. The health department cleared him to return to work in mid-May. But the company and the union teamed up to exploit the situation to rid themselves of a man they considered to be a whistleblower and a troublemaker.

Susan, the HR director for the company and George "Frankie" Ledbetter, who according to the union website is the business manager and financial secretary of IBEW Local 1424, both called him back to work before the date stipulated by the local health department. Because he had tested negative in the meantime, Grady did not think anything about it and returned to work.

No sooner did he return than they sprung their trap. "They said I was intentionally trying to get people sick, and they terminated me," he said. "They are using COVID-19 as a way to get out of a lot of things."

Over its history, the plant has changed hands repeatedly, from Encom to Arvin Supreme, Arvin Meritor and now Faurecia. The exhaust systems manufactured in the shop have undergone minor changes periodically. But every change of ownership has meant dramatic assaults on the wages, hours of work and the health and safety of workers in the plant. These assaults have only accelerated during the pandemic.

"When Faurecia took over, all hell broke loose," Grady said. "They are producing expensive and very profitable exhaust systems for light vehicles, commercial vehicles and farm equipment for multiple companies." According to *Automotive News*, one out of

every three vehicles on the road is equipped by the company.

"They are paying people nothing," Grady continued. "They have to work ten 12-hour days in a row before they get four days off; and if they have to call in for a day, the ten-day sequence starts again so they never get any time off.

"When I was a union steward, I fought for those people. But the union said, 'If you like the person, you can defend them. If you don't like that person, you don't have to.' I've seen that over and over again. I was told by the union, 'We have a good thing going with the company. Don't make any waves.' I gave up being a union steward."

Working on heavy welding equipment, he suffered a torn tendon in one shoulder which required rotator cuff surgery. He was off work for 35 days before returning with doctor's orders restricting him to light duty only. However, the company put him back on the same machine. When he complained to the supervisor, the boss said, "And you realize I don't give a f\*\*k. That's your job."

Predictably, his right shoulder was re-injured. When he approached Ruth Means, the company's representative for serious injuries, she said, "I fixed it once, I'm not going to fix it again." Angry, but not surprised, Grady said, "She tells everybody that. I could give you a hundred names of people to whom she has told the exact same thing. If you get hurt on the job, they invariably say you did not do that at Faurecia.

"Whether you get hurt or not, keep working. If you've got a limb hanging off you, put zip ties on it and keep going. I used to work at a hog processing plant, and the way they treat the hogs is the same as the way they treat the people at Faurecia. As long as you're an asset to the company, you are good. As soon as you're injured or worn out, you are gone. We still don't know who has been infected with coronavirus [there]."

Even before the coronavirus, workplace illnesses, especially cancer, were common at the plant. The National Cancer Institute at the National Institute of Health writes, "Occupational exposure to airborne hexavalent chromium is associated with increased risks of multiple cancers." Warning labels on the barrels of welding wire at the plant specifically name that compound. At the end of the day the welders and others around them have skin that is caked with the material.

Ventilation is at a bare minimum, and workers test the ventilation system with a piece of caution tape tied to a broomstick.

Grady has attended 12 funerals of co-workers at Faurecia. Eleven had died of cancer.

To illustrate the ruthlessness of the corporation, he described the heart-wrenching case of a young woman standing on the shop floor in tears. "They had found her grandpa unresponsive," he said. "She was afraid to go to HR, so I went with her and explained why she wanted to leave. HR said if her grandpa had died, she would be covered. But if she left and he did not die, she was going to be 'pointed,'" a reference to the system in which workers who accrue enough "points" for any reason are fired.

In another case, he described an older woman who stayed at work when she was sick because she was afraid of accumulating points for missing work. The next day when she did not report to work, she was found dead having suffered a massive heart attack. The company had quite literally worked her to death, he said. "Do you know what they did for her?" He asked. "Not a damn thing, no flowers, nothing."

But among Faurecia workers, a growing mood of rebellion is taking hold, demonstrated by the growing readership of the *World Socialist Web Site* and support for the Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee. "The company and the union are running around the plant telling everybody that this is not a credible website," Grady said. "Even the HR officer at the company is trying to get people to stop reading the *World Socialist Web Site*. That place runs on fear and intimidation."

*To send messages of support for James Grady, to get in contact with the Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee or for help setting up a committee at your own plant, contact the Autoworker Newsletter at autoworkers@wsws.org .*



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