

Restore the Eight Hour day!

Faurecia Gladstone workers oppose 12-hour shifts at FCA Sterling Heights Assembly

The Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee
12 October 2020

The following is a statement submitted to the World Socialist Web Site by the Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee.

To the members and supporters of the FCA Sterling Heights Rank and File Safety Committee:

We have read and discussed your statement that was posted yesterday on the *World Socialist Web Site*, and we agree with every word. We demand an immediate reinstatement of the eight-hour work day and call on autoworkers to join an all-out fight against the spread of the coronavirus.

You are not the only ones fighting against deadly conditions in our plants. You write: "This is an issue that affects us all, not just skilled trades. All over the country, and even the world, the eight-hour day is under attack." We agree. And we thank you for pointing out our own struggle at the Faurecia Gladstone auto parts plant in Columbus, Indiana.

We have been fighting against 84-hour work weeks since before the pandemic. Faurecia is working us to death. Many of our co-workers have gone to early graves as a direct result of these inhumane conditions. One who refused to take time off because of the ruthless point system suffered a massive heart attack and died. Several have fallen asleep at the wheel while driving before or after their shifts and then suffered horrific accidents. We are always exhausted.

In our plant, The carcinogenic compound hexavalent chromium is in the air and covers every wall and surface. Fresh paint turns black in just a few months. Healthy people who come to work in our plant develop asthma, COPD, lung and other cancers. Many have died young as a result.

"During the pandemic, workers are also being forced to work extra shifts over the weekend," you declare in your statement. You are absolutely right and we are with you.

Every day, many of us are forced to work hours over because the plant is short-staffed. This is not our fault. They fired more than two hundred workers early in the year to

exploit the Coronavirus. They have not hired them back. They are forcing us to do 12-hour days and work through the weekends.

The United Auto Workers union is a cesspool of corrupt criminals that have sold every right that the unions were built to defend. Our fathers and grandfathers fought and died so that we could live a decent life.

Although the union at Gladstone is not the UAW but the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the situation is the same. The IBEW works with management to frame up and victimize workers who oppose the inhuman treatment in the plant.

You will not be surprised that after our last contract every union officer was driving a brand new luxury vehicle. Faurecia got what it paid for. This was, according to the contract, "the right to manage operations however it deems necessary." They use that clause to override every grievance about unsafe work practices, doctors' medical restrictions and even the hours of work. In every case, what the company wants, the company gets.

Your statement reminds us that "In March, when the auto companies and the UAW conspired to keep us on the job as the pandemic raged out of control, we SHAP workers drew a line in the sand and refused to work in unsafe conditions. Wildcat actions spread outward from SHAP to other plants, including the Jefferson North, Warren Truck and Toledo Jeep Complex, and within a single day, the companies were forced to back down, at least temporarily, and close plants all over the country."

When Faurecia was forced to shut down most of the plant, the government granted them essential production status for the Commercial Vehicle Exhaust section. The company exploited the crisis to impose a schedule of seven 12 hour days and cut the pay of supervisors by 10 percent. They got rid of security and the cleaning crew and forced regular workers to double up on job assignments. For them, COVID-19 provided an excuse to squeeze more and more

out of each and every one of us.

At Gladstone we make the exhaust systems for Dodge trucks, Ford, Cummins and others. But make 30 to 40 percent less pay than legacy workers in the big three assembly plants. Decades ago the unions signed on to help the companies compete on the world market and maintain profitability. One of the strategies they imposed was to spin off these parts operations, to bankrupt pension plans and impose lower pay scales, unsafe conditions and forced overtime.

Faurecia is the tenth largest auto parts company worldwide. It has made a name for itself among the investment firms for its ability to take over the facilities and processes of established manufacturing companies, and drive up the rate of exploitation of the workforce by ruthlessly imposing inhumane conditions. That they force us to work in the midst of the deadly pandemic makes their policy undeniable. It is no less than industrial homicide.

The company is denying workers' requests to take vacation days off as a means of imposing forced overtime. When we ask for vacation time on Friday and Monday, we are desperate to get some rest. The company claims lack of help to deny those requests and force us to work through the weekend.

You state: "We must take matters into our own hands again and organize ourselves. The first step is to agree on a series of common demands." Again we could not agree more! These are demands we will stand behind:

1. End forced overtime! Return all skilled trades and production workers to eight hours per day, five days per week. Overtime must be strictly voluntary, and all work performed after 8 hours per day and/or 40 hours a week must be paid at a minimum of time-and-a-half.

2. Management must immediately fill all vacancies. This goes for skilled trades and production classifications. Skilled trades new hires should come, in the first place, from among qualified production workers.

3. Eliminate all tiers! All TPTs must be immediately hired in as full-time workers, with seniority accrued from their time as TPTs. To begin with, TPTs must be hired in to fill the spots left by other production workers hired on as skilled tradesmen.

At Gladstone the company has covered up infections and prevented us from getting tested to protect ourselves. We also therefore endorse the seven demands you make in relation to the pandemic:

1. All workers must be immediately notified of any cases of COVID-19 and all areas and shifts that are affected. This information cannot be kept secret from workers.

2. The companies must make available to workers a total count of positive and potential COVID-19 cases, updated in

real time.

3. Workers must have regular, universal testing. The current practices of temperature checks and self-reporting symptoms are just so much PR and worthless for protecting our lives and our families.

4. We will not be targeted, written up, terminated or harassed in any way for taking time off to get tested and get results, or for raising concerns about safety.

5. When there's a case confirmed, the factory should be closed for at least 48 hours for deep cleaning, not just the affected area, but the whole plant.

6. Social distancing must be implemented at all times—at workstations, when entering and leaving the plant and during bathroom, lunch and other break times. If social distancing is impossible at some workstations, they should either be redesigned, or the plant should be closed, with full compensation for all workers.

7. Whenever conditions are not safe, we have the right to collectively refuse to work, without any threat of retaliation by management or the union.

And finally, we join SHAP workers in fighting to build rank-and-file safety committees as new organizations of struggle at plants throughout the country. We already count ourselves as part of the same network, which includes committees at other FCA plants, at Ford and other parts plants, and also committees founded by teachers in Detroit, New York City and other major school districts opposed to the unsafe reopening of classes.

We close by endorsing the call to action at the end of the statement:

"If you agree with these demands, join us. Contact us by writing to autoworkers@wsws.org. To discuss these demands and a strategy to fight back, outside of the view of company and union spies, join the rank-and-file committees' Facebook page. And for more news about the real situation facing workers, subscribe to the World Socialist Web Site *Autoworker Newsletter*."

Signed,

The Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact