

Second worker at Nashville's AT&T office building dies from COVID-19

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A second worker at the iconic AT&T office building in Nashville, Tennessee recently passed away due to complications from COVID-19. The death has driven coworkers to reach out to local media to denounce the company's failure to respond to the spread of the deadly virus at their workplace.

The AT&T Building, known locally as the "Batman building" because of its unique architecture which resembles the cowl of the famous comic book character, opened in 1994. It remains the tallest building in the state and can accommodate up to 2,000 workers.

In comments provided to the city's Fox News affiliate, WZTV Nashville, one worker expressed the exasperation and anxiety shared by all workers forced to remain on the job during the pandemic. He said, "We are at our wits end. We have about three floors still being occupied because some of our jobs can only be done from the office. But we had a supervisor pass away in July and now a co-worker died from complications from COVID-19 [on October 21]."

Another worker, also speaking to WZTV, stated, "We all caught it from work," suggesting that there have been a number of infections among her coworkers. She added that the worker who died "didn't leave the house and put on a mask at all times when she did," refuting the oft-repeated claim by the corporations and management that workers themselves are to blame for the spread of the virus in factories and other workplaces.

Describing the company's policy in relation to COVID-19, the worker stated, "In order for us to stay at work, we basically need to say we have not been in contact with anyone who has tested positive. When we tell management all the people we've come into contact with, they are not relaying it to everyone on the

list, just those who work near you."

Workers who choose to take time off to get tested because they suspect they have the virus, or have been exposed to those who do, are faced with the threat of losing pay because the company has refused to compensate workers whose tests come back negative.

"Basically, if you are negative you don't get paid and if you are positive you do," stated one employee. "So if you need the money, you're basically incentivized to say you haven't been in contact with a positive person and not get tested unless you have symptoms."

The union covering AT&T workers in Nashville is Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 3808. Outside of issuing verbal "disagreements" with the company's lack of safety protocols and overall COVID-19 policy, the union has done nothing to ensure the safety of workers.

CWA Local 3808 President Deborah Sisco said in response to the company's testing and quarantining policy, "We don't agree with that policy. We don't agree as far as them not paying people as they wait for results. We are fighting the policy throughout our internal grievance procedure." That is, the union is not going to do anything to mobilize workers in opposition to management's disregard of health and safety.

Last year the CWA shut down a powerful six-day strike by 22,000 AT&T workers across nine Southern US states, including Tennessee. The CWA worked to confine the strike to the issue of "bad-faith bargaining," which paved the way for a speedy return to work without a contract or with any of the workers' issues being addressed.

With the murderous drive to reopen schools and the overall abandonment of any serious measures to confront the virus, the number of cases in Tennessee has soared in recent weeks. On October 26, the state's

department of health reported 2,279 new cases and 32 new deaths. The month of October has seen 709 deaths, surpassing the previous month's total of 700 and making it the state's deadliest month yet. With the fast approaching fall and winter seasons, these numbers will only grow.

The comments from AT&T workers in Nashville testify to the simmering mass opposition throughout broad sections of the working class to the ruling class's homicidal and anti-scientific policy of herd immunity.

To wage an effective fight, workers need their own independent organizations. AT&T workers should mobilize this opposition through building rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the CWA. The fight against the barbaric and inhuman policy of the corporations requires workers adopt a socialist perspective and program, prioritizing workers' health and safety over profits.



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