

Auto parts workers demand full disclosure as COVID-19 cases surge at Indiana Faurecia plant

Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee
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The Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee demands that the company and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers union (IBEW) make public all information, including dates and locations of cases, on the spread of the coronavirus in the plant. We hereby call on all of our brothers and sisters to be prepared to halt production if necessary so the plant can be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected to protect our lives and the lives of our loved ones.

It is outrageous and indefensible that Charlie, our self-sacrificing and loyal plant engineer for many years—a man who goes out of his way to help every worker and keep every line running—had to be sent home last Saturday with pneumonia which is very likely an advanced symptom of COVID-19. Despite the fact that he is nearing retirement, has underlying medical conditions and is at high risk for serious complications from the virus, the company has been treating him like an expendable commodity.

Forcing him to work long hours in every part of the plant in the midst of an upsurge of the contagion is only the most blatant expression of the contempt with which the company treats every one of us. They treat us like garbage.

But we are not alone. The rank-and-file safety committees in the United States know the plight of workers at the Magna auto parts plants in India. We are going through the same problems at the Faurecia Gladstone plant in Indiana, the FCA Sterling Heights Assembly Plant in Michigan and the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant in Illinois. We are fighting against the coronavirus under conditions in which we have been and continue to be lied to every day. We must have the truth.

The COVID-19 shutdowns which occurred throughout the world during March, April and early May and saved the lives of tens of thousands of workers did not happen because the corporations, governments and unions took action to protect the lives of workers. On the contrary, they only happened because our brothers and sisters rebelled against the unions and took matters into their own hands to save lives.

At Gladstone we were told that we had to work because we were essential workers when we were not. We were lied to. All of the companies that we produce parts for were shut down. The company used that lie to ramp up production and boost their profits. They closed most of the shop, permanently let go more than 250 people, and forced those of us left in the shop to work seven days a week for 12 hours a day. They took the government's money through the CARES Act—in essence our money—when they did not even have to operate.

The situation has reached a breaking point. The explosion of COVID-19 across the United States is accelerating. Hospitals from El Paso to Wisconsin are overwhelmed, and the death toll, already at 240,000, is projected to pass 400,000 by the end of January.

The powers-that-be know that the factories are centers that are spreading the disease. Illinois Democratic Governor J.B. Pritzker admitted last Friday that 52 industrial facilities have been the leading source of COVID-19 outbreaks since July 1. His statement followed by just a few days leaks in the news media of specific locations that were spreading COVID-19. State officials had these facts months ago but have been concealing them from the public.

What are the same statistics for Indiana and states across the country? We know that at Gladstone the management covers up cases and sweeps them under the rug on a daily basis to force us to come to work.

Throughout the auto industry, management is using safety regulations not to protect us, but on the contrary, to harass and victimize whistleblowers who speak up in defense of their fellow workers. Among the most notorious cases are the firing of James Grady here at Faurecia Gladstone and Sergio Contreras Ortega at GM's plant in Silao, Mexico.

They are trying to make this outbreak the employees' fault. The purpose of the form called "SAFETY CHAT" that we have to sign is to put the blame on us for the lack of safety in the plant. They claim it gives them the power to point you out and fire you for the least little violation of their safety rules.

They put up a good show up front when you first come into the plant, with safety films to watch and posted regulations that you have to stay six feet apart. In practice, the situation on most lines is just the opposite. We are packed in like sardines. You bump into each other. You are tripping over each other. And the company tells us again and again that it is not in the budget to correct these catastrophic conditions.

We have supervisors, gap leaders, forklift drivers and many others in the plant who tested positive for COVID-19 and suffered different levels of illness, from mild to severe. The company refuses to tell anyone who has been infected or who has been exposed. They sweep it under the rug and put somebody else in their place going on with business as usual.

We have single parents in the plant who have tested positive for the coronavirus, and they are scared to death that they will take it home to their children. Adding insult to injury, they are sent home to quarantine without being fully compensated for their time missing work. We are the victims, and we are made to pay for the company's negligence.

We have to put a stop to this madness that is going on around us!

Charlie is around everybody. He's the engineer. Anytime a line has a problem, Charlie has to go there. If he has COVID-19, it means that pretty much everybody in the plant has been exposed.

Just like management, our union, the IBEW, tells us nothing. All they do is work to keep us on the job.

Brothers and sisters, to fight this, we must rely on ourselves. We have come together to formulate our own demands. This is our five-point program of action:

1. Notify us of every COVID-19 case and when and where it occurred. We demand a nationwide database of every case in the auto industry updated in real time.

The claim that HIPAA prevents this is a lie. HIPAA provides for tracking infectious diseases to protect workers, *not* company profits.

2. We demand the best, up-to-date, rapid tests for every worker, every week. This applies to every new hire before they come on the shop floor.

3. If we have to quarantine, we demand full pay and no lost time from sick leave or FMLA.

4. Professional cleaning and sanitizing paid by the company must be implemented under rank-and-file supervision.

5. Forced overtime must end. Restore the eight-hour day at full pay.

We must unite with all other autoworkers, truckers, teachers, grocery workers, Amazon workers and other workers in a common fight to defend the rights of the working class.

If you agree with this program, take up the fight! Join the Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network today. Contact us at autoworkers@wsws.org.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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