

Situation critical as COVID-19 spreads through US auto plants

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The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* is receiving hourly reports of new COVID-19 cases at auto plants in the Midwest, as it becomes ever more apparent that the pandemic is spreading out of control.

At the Ford Ohio Assembly Plant (OAP) in Avon Lake, west of Cleveland, text messages from UAW Local 2000 officials indicate that there have been more than 27 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the last seven days. Management has brought in contingents of temporary workers to be ready to fill in on the assembly line to replace workers who get sick so that production can continue uninterrupted.

Workers also report outbreaks at Fiat Chrysler Sterling Heights Assembly, Sterling Stamping and Warren Truck in the Detroit area, as well as the FCA Tipton transmission plant in Indiana. Workers report a surge of cases at auto parts maker Faurecia in Columbus, Indiana.

Management, in collusion with the UAW, is attempting to cover up new cases in the plants, making it impossible for workers to know if they were in contact with infected individuals.

New COVID-19 cases in the US are at record levels, more than 150,000 daily, and deaths are rising. Midwest states such as Indiana, Michigan and Ohio, centers of auto production, are being hard hit, with record numbers of new cases and hospitals nearing capacity.

This makes it even more urgent for workers to join and help build the network of rank-and-file safety committees established to enforce safe conditions and save lives. In the present situation, this means fighting for the shutdown of auto and all non-essential production, as well as schools, until the virus is contained. Workers off due to the emergency must be guaranteed full pay funded by the massive profits of the

auto giants.

A worker from Warren Truck wrote to the *Autoworker Newsletter* Wednesday, “Two people at Warren Truck, door line with COVID as of today.”

“I heard from SHAP (Sterling Heights Assembly), [a] girl told the union she didn’t want to have the other people she was around to have to miss work, so they told her not to name names to medical.”

A temporary worker at Ford Woodhaven Stamping south of Detroit wrote, “I heard what happened and the deaths associated with COVID-19 in this plant. I bring my own supplies because none are there.

“There is no way you can be six feet apart. The floors around the area are not mopped or clean near the conveyors, it looks like dirty mop was wiped over it. When leaving the plant, I leave my mask on until I get to my vehicle because there is no distancing when workers leave.”

Ford Woodhaven Stamping is notorious for abuse of temporary workers. In October 2017, young TPT worker Jacoby Hennings tragically died at the plant under circumstances that have never been fully investigated.

The current situation at the Ford Ohio Assembly Plant appears to be particularly dire. New cases of COVID-19 are being reported daily, but management is attempting to maintain full production using temporary workers to replace those sick or in quarantine.

The plant employs 1,740 workers and produces highly profitable commercial vehicles such as medium duty trucks.

A UAW Local 2000 bulletin distributed to workers warned that, “We are definitely seeing a spike of positive COVID cases in the plant. Our plant will likely surge with COVID cases as our community surges with COVID cases.”

However, the UAW proposed no action, complacently asserting, “We can assure everyone that the union is making certain all safety protocols are being followed and to this point the protocols are working. [COVID] is not spreading throughout the plant based on the data we are monitoring.”

A Facebook post Wednesday by an OAP worker reported, “Another positive case in front axle build up/H line/night shift. The affected employee should have been quarantined last week as a close contact of the positive case from last week... but was not, so now you have member-to-member transmission. Which was told to the membership was not happening (by both company and union)

“And now 3-4 cases can possibly considered as close contacts in the positive case area. Instead of management calling these individuals and interviewing them to determine, they are being told to come to work and labor will talk to them and figure it out from there.

“What sense does that make? If you have a chance to reduce possibly exposing others to the virus by CALLING these individuals instead of interviewing them face-to-face where transmission can take place. Wouldn’t that be a better choice?”

A veteran worker at the Ford Ohio Assembly Plant told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “A lot of workers believe that Ford is using us as guinea pigs.

“The UAW shop chairman is sharing the positive cases. I understand that is not happening at all the plants.

“I don’t have the scientific data to say whether it is spreading or not. But they certainly have the means to get scientific data. But they are not bringing anybody from the outside to determine whether it is spreading. The company makes you feel like they are hiding something. That is the upsetting part. That is why people believe we are being utilized as some sort of experiment.

“The workers are doing what they can to fill in the gaps of safe practices, but I don’t see how Ford can say it is not spreading inside the plant. I believe they are flat out lying to the workers that it is not spreading.

“This might be the new norm of pandemics going through our society. They might be establishing what works or doesn’t work. There is someone somewhere sitting there tracking and they are putting dollar figures to it. Billions of dollars.

“Every vehicle we have on the lot is sold. It has a name attached to it. They are all commercial vehicles, they are pre-sold. That’s lots and lots of money.”

He continued, “This is the most horrible thing from a safety perspective I have seen in my career.

“I appreciate the articles you are writing, because we don’t see those kinds of articles in the regular press. Socialism gets a bad rap. I talk to people and say cut that out. Look at what they are writing. Is that not indicative of what is happening here?”

Another Ohio Assembly worker said, “There are cases every day. They are sending people home every day. They have people on standby, so that if someone gets sick they can cover the jobs.

“They don’t break it down by department. Unless you work right next to that person, you have to wait until you hear it through the grapevine.

“Now they say you only get paid three days whether you are out 14 days.

“They don’t put any protocols out on what you are supposed to do to get paid. When you lose 50 hours pay, that is a big chunk of money.

“If you know you are only going to get three days’ pay and are going to be off two weeks, you may say ‘No, I feel fine’ whether you do or you don’t.

“They have hired all these extra people for this, so they have the jobs covered. Right now we have 60 on temporary layoff.”

The *Autoworker Newsletter* urges workers to contact us about setting up a rank-and-file safety committee at your plants. We demand a halt to all non-essential production until serious measures are put in place to contain the virus. All workers must be compensated during the time of any plant shutdowns. With apparent progress toward the development of an effective vaccine it is doubly criminal to risk unnecessary death for the sake of corporate profits.



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