

# End the coverup of the outbreak at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant! Stop nonessential production with full pay for workers to contain the pandemic!

The Sterling Heights Assembly Plant Rank-and-File Safety Committee  
18 November 2020

*To contact the SHAP Rank-and-File Safety Committee, contact [autoworkers@wsws.org](mailto:autoworkers@wsws.org).*

The Sterling Heights Assembly Plant Rank-and-File Safety Committee demands an immediate end to the information blackout on the spread of COVID-19 in the plant by Fiat Chrysler management and the UAW. At the same time, we call on our brothers and sisters to prepare collective action to halt production to stop the further spread of this deadly disease and to demand full compensation until it is safe to return to work.

On Sunday night, Governor Whitmer admitted that manufacturing facilities were one of the biggest spreaders of the pandemic and warned that as many as one thousand state residents every week could die from the disease in the coming weeks and months. We know that infections are ripping through the Sterling Stamping plant, Warren Truck and Stamping, Jefferson North Assembly and other auto plants in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. But corporate management, the UAW and the governors of those states are refusing to halt production because for them corporate profits are more important than the lives of workers, our families and friends.

Last spring, autoworkers here at SHAP helped spark a wave of wildcat strikes that forced the shutdown of the auto industry. But after these actions, the company and the UAW regrouped, bid their time and forced through an unsafe reopening. Today, we are suffering the consequences.

What we need now is organization and a plan of action. We urge workers to join our committee, which has been established independently of the UAW, to

unite SHAP workers with workers in other plants and industries to prepare collective action to shut down all non-essential production and guarantee full pay and benefits for all workers.

The SHAP Rank-and-File Safety Committee demands an end to the corporate-UAW conspiracy of silence and complete transparency about the spread of the virus in the plants. Every day, the plant must report the number of new cases, the shifts and locations where they occurred, and the number of people exposed. To quickly halt any new outbreaks, every single worker must be tested on a daily basis at the company's expense. Other measures, including real social distancing, regular deep cleaning and keeping disinfectant and other cleaning supplies fully stocked, must be taken in order to limit further infections.

Dozens of workers are already infected and one worker, Mark Bianchi, is confirmed dead—not by management or the UAW, but by a relative posting a notice on Facebook. Meanwhile, virtually all of the UAW shop stewards have been sent home to quarantine, even as the union insists that workers remain in the infected plant.

The present outbreak was made inevitable by management's flagrant disregard for even the most basic safety protocols. Social distancing in many areas is simply impossible—the machinery is too loud, and workers have to resort to shouting at each other from two feet away in order to communicate. Scientific studies show that shouting can propel airborne particles far further than six feet.

The screening process was flawed from the

beginning. There is no time available to do checks effectively and people are routinely waved through the health checks as quickly as possible. In any case, temperature checks cannot screen for carriers who are asymptomatic. To make matters worse, people are now allowed to leave during lunch and come back.

Even the bathrooms are filthy and in a state of disrepair. At one bathroom in the northern portion of the plant, only one faucet out of four is functional, and it only dispenses cold water. How can anyone seriously wash their hands with cold water?

The additional cleaning measures added in May have been all but abandoned. We get one 10- minute period to clean at the start of our shift and that is it. Meanwhile, workers are continuously exposed to potential cross-contamination by supervisors and floaters moving between different departments.

When one of us gets sick, we are forced to jump through a series of baffling bureaucratic hoops. Every day you are off sick, you must call in to your supervisor or risk a no-call, no-show, even if you are too sick to speak. The aim of this is to deter you from calling in, so that they have no record of you being sick.

Even though you must quarantine after being exposed, you are only paid if you actually test positive. Fiat Chrysler makes it is so difficult to actually get paid while we are off in order to encourage people to remain ignorant about whether they are sick and take their chances while at work.

Contact tracing, rather than covering everyone in the same area as infected cases, is only done for those who had 15 minutes of continuous contact with a positive case. Even if you routinely use the same tools as another worker, you are not considered a "contact." The company's determination to test as few people as possible is all the more absurd given that tests are being given out for *free* at CVS pharmacies!

But the most shameless is the way in which the company exploits the economic desperation of temporary part-time (TPT) workers who have been hired by the thousands to fill in for workers with health concerns. TPTs have virtually no contractual rights and live in fear of being fired for reporting symptoms. One medical worker has informed us that TPTs are terrified even to go into the plant's clinic and beg them not to document their visits.

Many TPTs, lacking transportation of their own,

carpool to work—some in vehicles jammed full of people who don't work at SHAP. Frequently, none of the passengers in these cars are wearing masks. But even though they have already likely brought coronavirus with them into the building, management turns a blind eye as long as workers take the masks being handed out at the gate and wear it going in. Our committee is fighting for the unity of all workers—full-time, TPTs, production and skilled trades—in order to defend all our lives and livelihoods.

Far from defending workers, UAW Local 1700 President Louie Pahl has sent out a letter threatening workers who tell the truth on social media. Across the country, the UAW is functioning as a paid tool of management. This was further shown yesterday when Joe Ashton, former UAW VP and member of GM's Board of Directors, was sentenced to 30 months in prison on federal bribery charges, one of more than a dozen former UAW officials indicted on corruption charges.

There is an emergency situation here at SHAP, but this issue is affecting everyone, not only in plants throughout the United States but around the world. Just as the pandemic is global and the corporations in every country are continuing to operate in spite of outbreaks, so too the opposition among workers must be international in scope. Our walkouts in March were not just nationwide, they were part of a global strike wave that broke out first in Italy and Spain and also spread to Canada, Mexico and other countries. A stand taken now by American autoworkers would inspire and encourage workers all around the world.

If you agree with this, it is time to become involved. Contact us today to join the rank-and-file safety committee at SHAP. If you do not work at SHAP, join our sister committees at your own plant, or contact us for help in setting one up.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**