

Workers have the right to information and free speech!

What's behind the UAW's attack on the World Socialist Web Site

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

The Sterling Heights Rank-and-File Safety Committee condemns the attacks by United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1700 President Louis Pahl on the *World Socialist Web Site* in a union podcast last week. The WSWS and its *Autoworker Newsletter* are widely respected at SHAP and auto plants across the country because it tells the truth and gives workers a voice and a way to defend ourselves, unlike the UAW.

Pahl's real aim is to silence workers and keep us from getting the information we need to protect ourselves and our families from the spread of COVID-19 in the plant. We have already lost at least five brothers and sisters at SHAP, including, most recently, Mark Bianchi in Dept. 3330. On Saturday, Stevie Brown, a TPT at Warren Truck, died less than a month after being hired.

As far as the UAW and Fiat Chrysler are concerned, workers have no right to information or free speech. Pahl's rant against the WSWS comes only a week after he sent a threatening message to workers on Facebook warning of retaliation from management for posting critical comments on social media.

While it is telling workers to shut up and keep working, the UAW has pulled its own stewards from the plant floor and Solidarity House is still working remotely. The UAW officials are trying to save their own skins even as they sacrifice us to FCA's profits.

"This is an anti-union website that seeks to destroy or discredit the union," Pahl said. "Don't believe anything you see or read on social media. Especially this website." The union, Pahl claims, is the only legitimate source of information which workers should believe.

Pahl cannot and does not point to a single inaccurate

article produced by the WSWS. As for his assertion that the WSWS is seeking to "destroy the union," it is hardly necessary to remind our coworkers that the UAW is under criminal investigation for accepting millions of dollars in company bribes and stealing dues money. The gangsters who have run the UAW long ago destroyed whatever was left of a "union" inside of that organization. Today, it is nothing more than a cheap-labor contractor for the auto bosses.

Would an organization that really represented workers force us to stay on the job while a deadly disease was running rampant in the plants? Would it mouth the lies of the management that the plants are "safe" even as workers were dying?

What is the real record?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the WSWS has published dozens of articles documenting the spread of the disease throughout the auto industry and the statements of rank-and-file safety committees like ours, which have been set up independently of the UAW. To name only a few recent examples, there was our statement on the outbreak underway at Sterling Stamping ("Coronavirus spreading out of control at Sterling Stamping Plant: A case study of infections in the US auto industry"), a report on an outbreak of at least 100 cases at FCA's Tipton Transmission Plant ("Workers report dangerous outbreak at Fiat Chrysler transmission factory in Indiana") and the recent death of a worker at FCA's Warren Truck plant ("With COVID-19 spreading through auto plants, workers report death at FCA Warren Truck Assembly Plant").

None of the facts exposed by the WSWS have even been publicly acknowledged by the UAW. Local 1700 did not even report the death of Mark Bianchi until it

was first announced by a relative on Facebook and then reported on in the WSWS.

After more than eight months, Local 1700 is only now releasing some statistics about the virus in the plant. But we know from a leak at FCA's Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit (reported on only by the WSWS) that management has always provided the UAW with detailed reports on the spread of infections in the plants. While the WSWS has reported what information we had access to, the UAW has joined management in concealing it.

The biggest fear of the UAW, from the UAW International down to the local level, is that rank-and-file workers are drawing the conclusion that we must take collective action to protect ourselves. The WSWS articles, including, "Workers must stop production to contain coronavirus outbreak at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant!" have been widely circulated, and workers are demanding strike action to close nonessential production and halt the spread of disease.

In the podcast, Pahl insisted that no such action was permissible unless it was sanctioned by the International UAW. "The local can't just say 'this is a legitimate walkout, we are walking you out because of a,b,c,d,' we have to be given permission, we would have to submit that to the International and the IEB to make a decision. Anything other than that would be a wildcat, and we would never subject our members to... the repercussions from those actions."

Who does he think he is kidding? Gamble and Cindy Estrada who are collecting their \$215,000 salaries plus perks from the comfort of their homes would never do a thing that undermined the profits of FCA. From the beginning of the pandemic, Gamble & Co. have done everything they could to bamboozle workers and keep them on the line as long as possible. Gamble declared his goal was to "keep the economy flowing" and on March 16 the union joined a "Coronavirus Task Force" to "work together" with the auto companies.

As nearly 30 autoworkers died and the demand to close the plants became overwhelming, Gamble issued a statement "demanding" a two-week shutdown in the morning of March 17 only to abandon it the following night to announce a deal to keep the plants open. Within hours, we SHAP workers responded by walking out and sparking a nationwide strike wave, which actually shut down the industry. This display of class

unity saved countless lives.

From the beginning, the WSWS did everything it could to encourage the independent initiative of workers to shut down nonessential production to halt the pandemic. On March 14, when there were less than 3,000 confirmed cases in the United States, the WSWS published a statement, "Shut down the auto industry to halt the spread of coronavirus!" which went viral.

Since the end of lockdowns in the summer, the WSWS has helped workers to fight back against union collusion by helping workers to form rank-and-file safety committees. It has published dozens of statements from committees around the world composed of autoworkers, teachers and public transit workers.

In the end, the pathetic comments of the Local 1700 officials only expose their fear that workers are finding a new voice and organization to defend their interests. Our committee will not be intimidated, and we urge all of our brothers and sisters to make the decision today to join the SHAP Rank-and-File Safety Committee.

Join the WSWS-sponsored Facebook page to discuss the situation in the plants outside of the prying eyes of union and corporate spies, and contact us at autoworkers@wsws.org to learn how to become involved.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact