

“This is the catalyst”: Autoworkers support call for nationwide shutdown with full compensation

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Readers of the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* in US auto plants are reacting with enthusiastic support for Tuesday’s statement of the Socialist Equality Party, “For emergency action to save lives! Close schools and shut down nonessential production! Full compensation for workers!”

The pandemic is continuing its daily, life-threatening spread throughout the auto industry. The *World Socialist Web Site* has confirmed at least four autoworker deaths in the Detroit metro area over the last month: Mark Bianchi at Fiat Chrysler’s Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP); Stevie Brown and Stephanie Weems at Fiat Chrysler’s Warren Truck plant; and John Stamper at the Faurecia parts plant in Saline. After finally breaking its silence and acknowledging the deaths of three workers at its plants, Fiat Chrysler, together with the United Auto Workers, disavowed responsibility and claimed without evidence that the fatal infections had been contracted outside of the plant.

In March, autoworkers at SHAP, Warren Truck and other plants took the initiative and halted production through wildcat work stoppages and job actions, saving thousands of lives and defying the management-UAW conspiracy to keep plants operating in the teeth of the pandemic.

Since the automakers and the UAW regrouped and restarted production in May, autoworkers around the country have been preparing for the next wage of struggles by forming rank-and-file safety committees in their plants, with the assistance of the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party. These committees have been gathering and publishing crucial information on the spread of COVID-19 and have been

organizing workers throughout the industry in opposition to both management and the union.

A member of the Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee in southern Indiana said: “Forcing us to work when the coronavirus is uncontrolled and will likely lead to 770,000 deaths is criminal. And our government has allowed them to do that, and it is we the working class that need to stop it.

“I know the company has called several people that have had coronavirus and told them to come back to work after only 10 days. They told them, ‘Well, if you don’t have a fever then you can come back.’ They don’t care whether they have coronavirus or not. They are forcing them back. And they are only paying \$200 a week when you are on quarantine. Nobody can live on that.

“A lot of people have not been able to work because of the coronavirus. You don’t see these companies taking care of people. They want to exploit the situation to make a profit, like Faurecia, calling people in before they should.

“We need to take a stand, like it says in the SEP [Socialist Equality Party] statement. We need to take it away from them. We need to secure the money so that we can take care of the working class, not the top 4, 5, or 6 percent. They don’t need it. They have raped us long enough. It is time for us to take control.

“We need to get together, formulate a plan and take strike action. We need to get what the working class needs. Not just factories, not just teachers, I’m saying the whole working class, along with small businesses, because the government did not give these small businesses what they need.

“It just irks me to death that they do not care.

‘Pandemic profiteers,’ what else can you call them? That is what they are doing. They are not out to help us. They are out for themselves.”

An auto parts worker in the Detroit area said: “We need to do something. A lot of people I’ve worked with seem to be in denial. they don’t go and get checked when they have symptoms. But we need to get this under control. No one else is going to do it but us.”

A worker at Ford’s Van Dyke Transmission plant said: “It is wrong at many levels. At the end of the day the union sponsors the Democrats.

“We all know it can affect the younger generation. They are going to bring it home [from school] to their parents and grandparents. Why are you going to send kids back to school but you can’t go to a restaurant to eat or get your hair done?

“It’s all about business. It’s not about doing right. It’s all about numbers. If I keel over today, they are just going to take me off my job and someone else is going to take over within minutes. I am nothing more than a number, we all are.

“The company has nothing to lose. If a legacy person dies, they save a lot of money. They know that, and that is why they are doing it the way they are doing it. They are targeting the elderly. Those are the people on Social Security and Medicare.”

She noted that the shutdown had hit small businesses hard. “[But] the automotive industry got billions because of the pandemic. My nephew shut his business down. He applied for the money, but he didn’t get approved. They said they only had so much money. But even if he got approved, he would only get \$1,800. That’s not enough to save anything.”

A skilled trades worker at Fiat Chrysler’s Warren Stamping Plant said: “Since first discovering the WSWs, I have found myself agreeing more and more with what you say. I agree that immediate measures need to be taken to stop the spread of the coronavirus.

“It is heartbreaking to watch the news. Those who are dying are working people like myself. Everything in America is about money and more money and there is no concern for human life. I personally feel it is outrageous that the billionaires in this country have increased their wealth since the outbreak. As the WSWs noted in a previous article, they are feasting on death and do not care one iota about what happens to working people. As you say in the statement, what

good is a vaccine if people are dead. I support the call for a full shutdown of non-essential production and the closure of schools.”

“As far as the corporations are concerned, they are showing that profit is more important to them than human life,” a member of the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant Rank-and-File Safety Committee said. “If [Senate Majority Leader] Mitch McConnell gets this language in the stimulus package immunizing businesses from lawsuits stemming from the virus, people will die because of that.”

“The coverage in the *World Socialist Web Site* has really been a catalyst for activating workers,” a member of the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant Rank-and-File Safety Committee said. “You have in the plants a ‘silent majority’ of people who are furious about what they are doing with the coronavirus but are afraid to speak up, and sometimes people feel like they are the only ones who are upset.

“But when people read the truth about what is happening and share with their coworkers, they find out that the people around them care deeply. People are looking for a voice of reason. And now among the workers that I speak to about the *Autoworker Newsletter* and about rank-and-file committees, we are sharing information with each other as we find it. This is how it all starts.”

For more information about joining or forming a safety committee at your plant, contact the World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter at autoworkers@wsws.org.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact