

As it keeps them in unsafe plants

UAW lectures workers on “practicing gratitude” and keeping up “healthy habits” this Christmas

Kathleen Martin, Tom Hall
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This week the United Auto Workers (UAW) published tips for “Coping with Holiday Stress during a Pandemic” on the blog for its Fiat Chrysler division.

The small minority of autoworkers who actually read the article, especially those whose headaches are only beginning to subside after reading UAW President Rory Gamble’s Thanksgiving message, no doubt responded by rubbing their eyes in disbelief. The same gangster-ridden organization which has spent the year working with management to cover up infections and deaths in the plants and force workers to keep working during the pandemic dares to lecture them about how to handle holiday “stress?”

“On the surface, this is funny in a tragic way,” a worker from Jefferson North Assembly Plant told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “A response is required, but that’s after we get over the ‘what the f***’ moment this article inspires. I pay dues for this?”

As of this writing, nearly 320,000 Americans have died from coronavirus. Dozens of autoworkers have died in the pandemic throughout the year as a direct result of the decision, made with the support of the UAW and the Democratic and Republican Parties, to keep plants operating during the worst months of the pandemic. It is now acknowledged that large manufacturing plants are, together with schools, among the leading causes for community transmission of COVID-19. But the worst has yet to come in the months before vaccines become widely available, with conservative estimates of deaths by April 1 at 500,000.

In other words, the UAW bears a major share of the responsibility for the very “stress,” caused by mass infections and death, which autoworkers are now experiencing. The letter is the equivalent of a murderer advising his victim’s family about how to cope with their loss.

But the UAW bureaucracy, whose capacity for short-

sighted self-indulgence is equaled only by its sheer indifference to the fate of autoworkers, could hardly contain their blast of holiday cheer. The union is full of “good tidings” now that federal investigators have officially ended their criminal probe into the union in a deal which avoids a federal takeover and even allows the UAW to pick their own “independent” monitor. Moreover, although it was staggered by a wildcat strike wave which shut plants in the spring, the union has been able to make it through the year without a full scale rebellion to throw out this rotten organization—so far.

Most autoworkers will not have the stomach to read through their entire wretched article. So, as a public service, the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* publishes below a summary, with the appropriate translations.

What they say: “Acknowledge your feelings. If you have lost a loved one or can’t be with those you hold dear, it’s normal to feel sadness and grief. It’s Ok to take time to cry or express your feelings.”

What they mean: If COVID-19 killed or infected someone you love because we forced everyone to work during a deadly pandemic, carry that burden however you have to—just make sure you don’t do it on the clock. Or in the plant. Or to your coworkers. Or on Facebook. And definitely not in the *World Socialist Web Site*. We’re watching and listening and on the lookout for troublemakers.

What they say: “Plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, checking in on friends and other activities.”

What they mean: Plan your life around this job. Days off are not for resting, they’re for catching up on all the stuff you didn’t have time to do because you were working mandatory overtime the whole year. That isn’t enough time? Not our problem.

What they say: “Stick to a budget. Before you go gift and grocery shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Don’t try and buy happiness with an abundance of gifts.”

What they mean: If, hypothetically, you absolutely must “buy happiness” with, say, expensive steaks, fine wine and endless rounds of golf at Palm Springs, be sure to pay for it with bribes and stolen union dues.

What they say: “Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions may refresh you enough to handle everything that you need to do.”

What they mean: Now that you’re off for the holidays, take the time “for yourself” that you haven’t had for months, since we signed off on eliminating extra breaks to allow for cleaning while you were pulling 50-plus hour workweek.

What they say: “Don’t abandon healthy habits. Continue to get plenty of sleep and physical activity. If you are on medication, make sure to take each and every dose as prescribed. If you’re seeing a counselor, keep your appointments, or request an extra appointment if needed. Request a visit by phone call or virtually if you can’t meet in person.”

What they mean: Don’t get into any unhealthy habits, like going to work and catching coronavirus in the plant, or slipping on oil slicks which have been left on the floors for years, or being killed or injured by equipment that has not been properly maintained. Practice healthy habits like us. That’s why we’ve canceled all local meetings since April and have pulled our stewards and committeemen from the shop floors at factories throughout the country.

What they say: “Be realistic. The holidays don’t have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones.”

What they mean: Nothing can bring back the dead, so you might as well get used to missing certain people during the holidays.

What they say: “Reach Out. If you need emotional or physical support, ask your friends or family for help. If you are feeling stressed & overwhelmed you can also reach out to your EAP Representative to learn about resources that are available to you.”

What they mean: If you need support, your “friends” at Fiat Chrysler and the UAW are here to help—the same ones that are denying workers comp claims to COVID-19 survivors and claiming that none of your coworkers contracted the virus inside the plant.

What they say: “Practice Gratitude. Gratitude is a major focus this time of year, and while it may seem harder to find

things to appreciate, there is still plenty to be thankful for. Make a conscious effort to regularly identify some things that you’re grateful for. It can be something as broad as your health, or something as specific as your favorite song playing on the radio the last time you got in the car. Change is hard, but it isn’t always bad. There are still ways to celebrate the season with your loved ones, even if you must give up some of your favorite traditions.”

What they mean: Be grateful that you still have a job. And change isn’t always bad—for example, in spite of the pandemic, Fiat Chrysler made \$1.5 billion in profit in the third quarter, even more than last year! And if a few of the older workers die of the virus, then that’s more we get to keep out of the VEBA fund.

This is how the UAW proposes that autoworkers fight the “holiday blues.” Here is ours: that autoworkers use the holiday break to begin planning a nationwide counter-offensive against the “herd immunity policies” of the capitalist ruling elite.

Autoworkers should organize themselves as the tip of the spear of a movement for a nationwide general strike to shut down nonessential production as well as schools until the vaccine becomes widely available. The billions of dollars in corporate profits and trillions made on Wall Street must be confiscated in order to guarantee full compensation to workers and to pay for a massive public health program to bring the disease under control.

To prepare for this, and to break through the company and UAW attempts at isolating workers from each other—which greatly exacerbates the “blues” that the union claims to be concerned about—make the decision today to join or form a rank-and-file safety committee at your workplace. The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* stand ready to assist, as we have at plants, schools and warehouses throughout the country.

For more information, contact us at autoworkers@wsws.org.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact