

## Industrial murder at General Motors

# Autoworker crushed to death at Marion Stamping Plant in Indiana

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Last Wednesday morning an incident interrupted production at the General Motors Stamping Plant in the small town of Marion, about 60 miles northeast of Indianapolis, that will likely haunt the workers who witnessed it for the rest of their lives.

The plant forms sheet metal body parts to supply the Fort Wayne Assembly Plant, which manufactures Chevy and GMC full-size pickup trucks, as well as shipping to truck assembly plants in Michigan, Texas, Kansas and other states.

Production and shipping schedules require the Marion plant to store between one and two days of buffer product. They use 4-inch-by-4-inch horizontal steel tubing welded into moveable wall sections that span from the factory floor to the roof structure 20 feet overhead to separate the storage racks loaded with body parts from other areas in the plant where workers are engaged in production.

Since 2007, the company with the complicity the UAW has outsourced janitorial and machine cleaning services to replace GM workers who previously did that work. On Wednesday the contractor Caravan was using at least one giant fork truck to move a steel wall section that is 40 feet long by 20 feet high and weighs approximately 7,000 pounds when a malfunction caused the wall to crash to the floor slab crushing an electrician who was working in the vicinity.

His name was Mark McKnight, a highly skilled and careful worker who was 57 years old. Everybody liked him, a co-worker commented, “the nicest guy you could ever meet.”

“It just literally smashed him,” another worker reported to the *World Socialist Web Site*. “His head was smashed flat. There were bones everywhere. Blood was

all over the floor. It was just horrible.”

Normally they chain these wall sections to the fork truck. For some reason, they needed to put the section down, and the fork truck moved, bumping the wall and causing it to tip over.

A report by Stephen D. Dorsey, deputy chief of the Marion Police Department on December 30, 2020, states: “Officers spoke with Robert Ogden, Sight (sic.) Director of General Motors who...stated that employees in that area were moving a floor to ceiling wall unit of 4x4 metal tubing welded together. The wall unit had not been secured to the floor or a connecting wall beam. ...[when the] floor to ceiling wall...tipped over, Mr. McKnight was unable to avoid being struck by the falling wall which ultimately caused his death.”

The plant of 2.758 million square feet opened in November 1956. In 1970 the town was home to 40,000 people. Since then the area has been devastated by deindustrialization, with the census count dropping to just over 28,000 in 2017.

Like autoworkers around the country, Marion workers have been subjected to an endless cost-cutting and speedup campaign, aided and abetted by the UAW, which has undermined safety conditions and eliminated longstanding job protections, leading to a sharp increase in outsourcing and subcontracting.

In 2011, GM closed its Indianapolis stamping plant—wiping out 650 jobs—after workers rebelled against demands by the corporation and the United Auto Workers union that they accept a 50 percent wage cut to attract a new owner to buy the plant.

As recently as 2014 GM Marion Stamping employed 1,600 workers. Today’s workforce stands at just under 800 workers, who are all members of UAW Local 877.

Median household income stood at \$37,684 in 2017 while the same figure for the state was \$54,181, and nationally was \$61,372. The same year fully one out of four, or 25.9 percent of residents, lived in poverty.

Indiana and its automotive towns like Marion, Muncie, Kokomo, Ft. Wayne and Anderson—long identified with militant struggles by autoworkers—have been laid waste by the downsizing of the auto industry with the complicity of the UAW. Between 2007 and 2009, auto parts suppliers eliminated more than 22,000 jobs, and the sector now employs 30 percent fewer workers than a decade ago, according to the *Times of Northwest Indiana* web site.

In July 2014 a chemical explosion involving a chlorine dioxide tank and another sub-contractor, Quaker Chemical, at the plant killed one worker and injured eight others.

McKnight's death is not an isolated incident. It is the second fatal industrial accident in the auto industry which the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported on in as many months. In mid-November, 42-year-old parts worker David Spano was crushed to death by a 25,000-pound manufacturing mold at the Romeo RIM plant in suburban Detroit.

Moreover, the death of Mark McKnight takes place in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed over 350,000 in the United States and dozens in the auto industry. However, the true death toll is being deliberately concealed by the auto companies, with the support of the UAW, in their bid to maintain brutal speedup to keep production at pre-pandemic levels. On the basis of mass infection and death, the auto companies actually made more profits in the third quarter of 2020 than in the previous year.

This includes a plan by Fiat Chrysler to impose 84-hour workweeks on skilled trades at its Sterling Heights Assembly Plant north of Detroit. The automaker was forced to temporarily shelve its plans after outrage from autoworkers in the plant and around the country, which was given voice in extensive coverage in the *World Socialist Web Site*.

On December 16, the Socialist Equality Party published a statement, “For emergency action to save lives! Close schools and shut down nonessential production! Full compensation for workers!,” which proposed that workers prepare for such action by organizing around the following demands:

- The immediate shutdown of nonessential production
- The closure of all schools and universities to in-person instruction
- Full compensation for workers during the shutdown, including the immediate reinstatement of the \$600-per-week supplemental unemployment benefits.

To fight for these demands, the WSWS and the SEP have helped autoworkers to form a network of rank-and-file safety committees at workplaces and schools around the country.

As the Autoworker Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network wrote in its own statement on December 23, “The capitalist class will never agree to such demands willingly, and all appeals to reason and humanity will fall on deaf ears. This struggle will pit workers directly against Biden and the Democrats, who, no less than Trump and the Republicans, defend the interests of Wall Street. Therefore, workers must organize themselves as an independent force, opposing both management and their paid stooges in the UAW.

“We have already founded rank-and-file safety committees at several major FCA and Ford assembly plants, and we note with pride the founding in December of a committee by parts workers at Faurecia Saline. We also urge Ventra parts workers in Sandusky, Ohio, as well as GM workers to contact us to begin setting up their own committees at their factories. The Rank-and-File Safety Network must be expanded, with committees organized in every plant. Now is the time to stand together!”

To build a mass political and socialist movement against both corporate-controlled parties, autoworkers should join and build the Socialist Equality Party as the leadership for the coming struggles of the working class.

*For more information and to join or build a committee at your plant, contact us at [autoworkers@wsws.org](mailto:autoworkers@wsws.org).*



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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