

Indiana auto parts workers join calls for four-week shutdown of the auto industry with pay to stop the spread of the virus

Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee
23 April 2021

Rank-and-file workers at the Faurecia Gladstone auto parts plant in Columbus, Indiana erupted in anger on Tuesday as word spread of a serious outbreak of COVID-19 at the factory. Vital information had been kept from all those who had been exposed so that the company could maintain production to push profits at the expense of safety.

A mid-level manager tested positive last week and disappeared without telling any of the men and women on the shop floor that he may have exposed them to the coronavirus.

In response to these latest revelations, the Faurecia Gladstone Rank-and-File Safety Committee issued the following statement calling for an emergency four-week shutdown of the auto industry, with full compensation for workers. The committee was launched by workers last August as part of the national Autoworker Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network.

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Brothers and Sisters at Faurecia Gladstone:

It was leaked out on Tuesday that a manager in Commercial Vehicle Exhaust tested positive last week for COVID-19. There is no excuse for the company and the union to cover this up for five days, leaving those of us who may have contracted the deadly contagion to continue to spread it. They kept their mouths shut because pushing production and boosting company profits are more important to them than the health, safety and welfare of ourselves, our family members and the community at large.

The fact that we have coworkers of all ages who continue to come down with COVID-19 and are forced into quarantine from different sections of the plant is proof that the virus is out of control. Moreover, the forced overtime and chaotic pace of production imposed on us by the parts shortages and shifting from line to line increases the stress and strain wearing us down, making us more susceptible to infection.

If we take the virus home, we may survive; but a loved one, or a friend, may die or suffer permanent damage from the disease. We do not even know the long-term effects to those who do survive falling ill.

A new study in the scientific journal *Nature* found that people

whose coronavirus infections did not require hospitalization still had a significantly greater risk of death—60 percent higher—than people who had not been infected with the virus.

As many of you at Gladstone know, this manager works all over the plant. On a regular day he is in contact with everybody in CVE as well as with many others on LVE side. It is very likely that before his test results came back, he was spreading the virus throughout the building, while we were kept in the dark.

The company says that he was already vaccinated when he came down with it. That is known to occur in a small but significant percentage of cases. There is no excuse for the company's cover up.

It just goes to show that Biden's policy, no less than Trump's and the campaign in the media that the pandemic is almost over, is based on a lie: that it is safe to fully reopen the economy and stop public health measures while vaccinations are still being rolled out. As long as the virus is allowed to spread uncontrolled, the possibility exists that it can mutate into a more virulent and deadly form, such as the B.1.1.7 variant, which is spreading like wildfire throughout Michigan.

On Wednesday, Indiana COVID-19 Update reported 1,166 new cases and 14 deaths. Since March last year, 12,840 Indiana residents have died from it and 710,607 have contracted the disease.

To stop the pandemic requires a knock-out punch. That means shutting down all non-essential production, reverting to online learning instead of in-person schools, and conducting universal testing and contact tracing. Massive funds are needed for medical services, hiring the necessary healthcare staff, and for new hospital space, as well as mass vaccinations. These measures must be combined, organized and funded to be implemented worldwide. The virus does not need a passport to cross borders and has no respect for nationality or ethnic background.

As if to demonstrate how reckless and ruthless Faurecia is, before he tested positive, the manager said that as soon as he gets everybody vaccinated in the plant, he's going to do away with masks, social distancing and every other precaution

against the spread. In other words, our situation is going from bad to worse.

Some of you have asked us how the manager got his vaccination before anybody else. The answer is both simple and disgusting. They put him in front of the line because they want him healthy, to push production and company profits whether we get sick or not.

Most workers are in favor of shutting down to bring the virus under control, but we cannot live without a paycheck. The money that was handed over to the corporations in the CARES Act amounts to more than \$4 trillion dollars. That is more than enough to compensate everyone who would have to be off work to bring the contagion under control.

The Democrats and Republicans don't want to do shut down because it will hurt the oligarchs financially. We have to prioritize human life above company profits.

Some of you are discussing bringing a class action lawsuit against the company and the manager because they endangered us and our families. The legal system may pretend to represent an impartial body of laws that treat everyone equally, but in reality it is a system which defends the property rights of the corporations and the banks against the working class which they exploit.

The class action that needs to be taken is the working class organizing in rank-and-file committees to shut down the schools and non-essential production until the virus is under control, as determined by independent scientists and medical experts.

We urge you to read the *World Socialist Web Site* and think about what is happening in the working class around the world.

Truckers on the docks, coal miners in Alabama and nurses in Massachusetts are joining farmers in India, teachers and medical workers in many parts of the world in struggles for better wages and working conditions and a halt to the spread of COVID-19.

Our 1025 line, which produces exhaust systems for Volvo Trucks and John Deere, has been shut down for two days this week. Nearly 3,000 workers at Volvo's New River Valley (NRV) assembly plant have been on strike since April 17 for improved wages and working conditions. And our Dodge truck line, which supplies the Warren Truck plant outside Detroit, will be down for two weeks.

We are short key materials throughout the plant. 1025 is lacking the catalytic converter bricks at the core of the system, as well as steel from China, insulation, temperature sensors, oxygen sensors and other electronic components.

Because of the chaos in the global supply chain, we are being bumped around throughout the plant. When one line shuts down for lack of materials, you have to move somewhere else, creating perfect conditions for the virus to spread.

Coworkers are reporting medical diagnoses of excessive stress, a direct product of the regime at the plant. Remember that Damian Jones, a young worker in PC & L at Faurecia in

Saline, Michigan, died last July of a seizure when he was working 12-hour days, seven days a week.

Yesterday the company started scanning badges when we enter the factory. The recent shootings at FedEx in Indianapolis may be related. The company hires workers from 18 different agencies because of the high turnover due to the brutal conditions we work under. Management is fearful of a disgruntled employee returning to the factory.

We endorse and call for our brothers and sisters to support the following demands that the Autoworker Rank-and-File Safety Committee Network put forward at meetings last Saturday and Monday:

- Given the dangerous conditions with the unchecked spread of COVID-19, all auto plants must be shut down for four weeks until vaccinations become available and the pandemic is under control as determined by independent health experts.

- All workers on layoff must receive full income while shutdowns continue, without red tape and delays.

- We call for the expansion of independent rank-and-file safety committees, independent of the pro-company UAW, to organize the fight to save lives.

- Unite autoworkers with teachers, Amazon workers, logistics and health care workers to demand a science-based approach to fight the pandemic, including the shutdown of nonessential production. Organize a collective struggle to prioritize human life over corporate profit.

To get involved with the fight for these demands and for workers' lives and safety, join the rank-and-file safety committee at Faurecia Gladstone or at your plant, or learn more about starting one today by visting wsws.org/workers.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact