

WSWS Autoworker Newsletter campaigns for online May Day rally at Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant

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Workers at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant responded warmly to a *World Socialist Web Site* campaign team on Thursday building for the international online May Day rally sponsored by the WSWS and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

The May Day rally will initiate a global effort by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International to launch the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). This initiative is aimed at creating the means through which workers can conduct a global counteroffensive against the homicidal policies of the governments controlled by the capitalist ruling class, which are responsible for the worldwide catastrophe.

Far from receding, the pandemic, now in its second year, is accelerating under conditions where the ruling classes of every country are refusing to take the basic health measures needed to save human lives. Throughout the world, the trade unions and pseudo-left organizations have assisted capitalist governments in carrying out their homicidal policies, and at every turn have sought to block the resistance of workers.

“If we would get together with workers around the world that would scare the hell out of them. It would change things,” one worker said. “The issues with COVID are the same everywhere. They don’t want to shut us down because they have everything riding on the Dodge Ram pickup trucks. And they definitely don’t want to pay us SUB [supplemental unemployment benefit] pay. Meanwhile, I’m reading about India, they have five million people working on the Indian railroads, and when a train rolls into the

station, they have so many people crammed in there are people hanging on to the sides. Is it any wonder that the pandemic is hitting them so hard?

“They have a safety audit at SHAP this week,” he continued. “I think the reason for this is that they want to say that the reason people are catching the virus in the plant is because we’re not wearing masks, we’re not cleaning and so on. But they’re not even doing the ‘deep cleaning’ anymore that they had said they would do when they restarted production last year!”

Another worker said, “United we stand, divided we fall. We have to unite with workers in Mexico and in other countries. I remember when the WSWS held meetings where American workers met with Mexican autoworkers from Silao during the GM strike. That is really important. And yet the UAW is doing the exact opposite of this.”

There was a great interest in organizing outside of the UAW to fight. Many workers supported the call for a 4-week shutdown of the auto industry to stop the spread of COVID-19, which has accelerated over the last month in Michigan.

“I really want us all to come together [worldwide],” said one younger worker. “All they are interested in is getting out their product. They don’t even want to talk about COVID. The international UAW is in bed with the corporation. I don’t even know why we pay union dues.”

Many workers had heard about the death of crane operator Terry Garr who was crushed while installing a die last week at the nearby Stellantis Sterling Stamping Plant (SSP). Workers were shocked to learn that another SSP worker, Mark Bruce, had also died of COVID-19 this past week.

“No one cares about us,” was a common comment. “All they care about are their trucks.”

On April 28, Workers Memorial Day, the UAW responded to anger over the death of Terry Garr by calling for a one minute pause for a moment of silence in his memory. UAW President Rory Gamble issued a statement feigning sympathy for COVID-19 victims while boasting of “what we have accomplished” in supposedly keeping workers safe. He went on to claim that the UAW had demanded the temporary shutdown of the auto industry last year and the very limited COVID-19 safety protocols that were later implemented as a way to get workers back into the plants.

In reality, workers at SHAP and several other facilities forced a shutdown through wildcat strike action, in defiance of UAW attempts to browbeat them back to work. The action was part of an international upsurge in opposition to the policies of the ruling class to maintain production in the face of the pandemic, resulting in the temporary shutdown of auto production in North America and Europe.

“If you think back to last year, they wouldn’t have shut down at all if it wasn’t mandated,” one worker said. “The company and union were working together, they didn’t want to shut down; it was the workers who made them.” The worker strongly agreed with the fight to unite workers globally against the policies of the ruling class. “It’s got to be all over,” he declared.

He noted the fact that plants were being closed due to the shortage of computer chips needed in the electronic systems of vehicles, but that not a single day of production had been canceled since last May due to the spiraling COVID-19 deaths and infections. At SHAP alone up to 10 percent of the workforce is out due to COVID-19 or COVID-related quarantine but there has been no slowdown in production. “The only plants that are shut down now are for the chip shortage. They never shut down for any worker.”

“Things like the 8-hour day were fought for by workers, so that schedule surprised me. So did the alternative work schedule they implemented for production workers. It always comes back to saving money.”

One worker said the UAW is like a “government entity that does nothing for you.” He had worked in the parts industry before hiring in at SHAP, he said.

Many workers were upset that the plants had stayed open during the pandemic, adding that safety protocols put in place after the reopening had essentially been dropped. “Too many people have died,” one worker said.



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