Yet another COVID-19 death at Faurecia Saline, Michigan plant exposes continued pandemic danger

Tim Rivers
16 May 2021

A report from supporters of the Faurecia Saline Rank-and-File Safety Committee of yet another death from COVID-19 at the huge auto parts factory in Saline, Michigan is an indictment of the United Auto Workers and the administration of Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer, who have abandoned any serious efforts to halt the spread of the deadly virus.

According to the story being pushed by the governor's office, the trade unions and the big business media conditions in the state are improving and mask mandates and social distancing can be safely dropped. But the brutal truth is quite different.

On May 13, the Michigan health department confirmed another 2,057 new cases of COVID-19 and 112 more deaths in the state. If the current pace of infection and death were to continue for another year, it will more than double the accumulated death toll in the state for the past twelve months. The state's official COVID-19 death toll currently stands at 18,467, more than the 14,522 Michiganders who lost their lives in the Civil War, the nation's bloodiest conflict.

An older Faurecia Saline worker known as Will, who worked in the 702 department making glove boxes and other interior parts for the Ford F-150 pickups assembled at the Dearborn Truck Plant, died last week of COVID-19. As reported in the *World Socialist Web Site*, Jackie Pennington (55) died in April and Alex, a Process Tech on the Jeep line, also died several weeks ago. In the cases of Jackie and Alex the cause of death has not been publicly reported, although COVID-19 cannot be ruled out.

These deaths are only the latest in a series of tragedies over the last year at the plant. Another worker, John Stamper, died of a COVID-19-related heart attack last December. Lamont Newton, a whistleblower and critic of the UAW, was assaulted and forced out of the plant with a life-threatening medical condition last fall.

In July of 2020, Damien Jones died of a seizure in the midst of a grueling work schedule at the plant. Workers reported that at the time some people were working up to 84 hours a week to fulfill production goals.

Supporters of the rank-and-file safety committee say they have no way of knowing if a co-worker laboring next to them is carrying the infection.

"We could be at Ford," said a supporter of the rank-and-file committee as they discussed the recent rash of deaths in the plant. "The girl who died a couple of years ago on the job, they just taped her up and left her there and told everybody to step around her and get back to work."

Her colleague added, "I'm not very happy about the way that they are working and the way they are mistreating the employees. They only care about their parts. If somebody falls out, they expect you to walk over them and keep working. Just get them parts out. They don't care."

Both spoke with contempt of the recently installed union shop committee. "They are absent more than they are there. They speak up for nothing." In the recent union election approximately one out of four workers in the plant even bothered to vote.

"The union could try and do something," one added. "They know about these cases. The union could try and inform us. If the big dogs [plant management] don't tell us, they could at least tell us. They don't."

The word on the floor is that Alex died of a heart attack. But the full implications of his exposure to

© World Socialist Web Site

COVID-19 in the factory are unknown. Because the virus is prone to attack the heart muscle, those who have a heart condition, which includes a large portion of the population of working age, are more susceptible.

They are exposed to extremely dangerous chemicals throughout the plant, such as, for example, hexavalent chromium and isocyanide. “After inhaling those chemicals for so many years, they say that you may catch cancer from it,” a committee member added.

Flowing from these conditions, workers feel that a determined struggle is needed. “I can’t believe there is all this going on at Faurecia with people dying,” a worker concluded. “It is terrible,” she added. “Something needs to happen. We need to do it. And we have got to do it fast.”

The Dearborn Truck Plant at Ford’s flagship Rouge complex has been idled for two weeks because of the chaos in the supply lines for electronic parts. Car lots throughout the country are gaping empty while every lot around Detroit is packed with assembled vehicles which cannot be shipped because they are missing chips.

While plants are idled due to lack of computer chips, there is no halt of production due to the continued spread of COVID-19, expressing the subordinating of all considerations of health and safety to the pursuit of production and profit. The continuing toll of deaths at Faurecia Saline underscores the urgency of expanding the network of rank-and-file safety committees to oppose the reckless endangerment of human life for corporate profits. These committees, independent of the pro-management UAW, will forge links between workers in different plants and industries to provide workers with truthful information and develop a fight back. Autoworkers interested in helping set up a committee at your own workplace, 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

© World Socialist Web Site