

“They care more about these trucks than people”

US autoworkers call for shutdown of production as Omicron spreads

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To send us your own story about conditions at your plant, email us today at autoworkers@wsws.org. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

With the highly infectious Omicron variant spreading rapidly throughout the country, autoworkers are calling for a shutdown of production to halt the transmission of the disease.

The situation in Michigan and other Midwestern states where the US auto industry is concentrated is reaching the breaking point. New infections, hospitalizations and deaths are at record or near record levels. On Friday, the state of Michigan reported 40,692 new cases of COVID-19 and 259 deaths over a two-day period, a record number. The number of children becoming infected and going to the hospital is also reaching record numbers, and hundreds of hospital staff in the Detroit area are out sick, a situation described by local press as near the “breaking point.”

As has been the case throughout virtually the entire pandemic, the number of infected in the auto plants is being systematically concealed from the public by management with the assistance of the United Auto Workers union (UAW). However, workers report that 500 are currently out at Warren Truck Assembly plant and 300 were out last month at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP), both owned by Stellantis. Last month alone, three workers died of COVID at Sterling Stamping Plant, and at SHAP, a worker and her husband both died.

To maintain production, management is dispensing with any semblance of concern for health and safety. At Warren Truck outside Detroit, temporary workers are being required to work six days per week on 12-hour shifts. This follows the imposition of a 90-day “critical

status” period at SHAP in which management, per the terms of the current UAW contract, was allowed to force plant employees to work seven 12-hour-a day workweeks. “The critical status” expired on December 23, the day before Christmas Eve.

A supplemental worker at Warren Truck sent a letter to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* describing deplorable conditions including filthy bathrooms, leaking roofs and unsanitary workstations. In response to the letter, the WSWS received several submissions from workers about conditions in their own factories. A Detroit-area autoworker wrote, “My son has contracted COVID and is hospitalized. His friend has the new Omicron variant. I was exposed to that. How can they continue to keep the plants open when everything else is being shut down?”

Another said, “Also with all these COVID cases at Warren Truck they’re still making us work 6 to 7 days in these dangerous conditions. We need a break; our immune systems can’t get strong to fight off the virus. They care more about these trucks than people, it’s getting out of hand!!”

In response to the conditions at Warren Truck, a senior worker at the plant has started a petition against the forced overtime for temp workers. A copy of the petition sent to the *Autoworker Newsletter* said:

We the undersigned, have been devoting our time and energy into launching the new Grand Wagoneer. We collectively agree that if you make us work 12 hours a day, 6 days a week that safety, quality, delivery, cost and moral [sic] will be negatively impacted.

We understand that forcing us to work or having forced being available to work on an almost unlimited basis may comply with the CBA, along with State and Federal laws. The fact that something can be implemented doesn't mean that it should be.

The company's most valuable resource is its workers, human beings. We need to have time to take care of ourselves not only physically but mentally. We have families at home who miss us.

Therefore, we are demanding a reasonable limit to the overtime hours and days that can be scheduled daily and in advance."

WE ARE HUMAN BEINGS NOT MACHINES!

The only way we can continue to create world class quality vehicles, is if we be treated with the decency and respect that we deserve.

A worker at the new Stellantis Detroit Manufacturing Complex—Mack Avenue plant wrote to the *Autoworker Newsletter*, "At D2 there is no COVID cleaning between shifts. There's not enough time, [as] soon as the bell goes off, they want us to just jump on the line at our stations; no time for cleaning."

Another Stellantis worker wrote, "At Sterling Heights assembly plant there is no sanitation or concern for the employees and their families ... our coworkers' restrooms are nasty [and] need to be shut down for a week or two for cleaning because COVID is running rampant at FCA Sterling Heights plant."

A worker at John Deere's Parts Distribution Center in Milan, Illinois told the WSWS: "They don't text us anymore if there is a case. We have no idea how many have been sent home or not sent home. This company couldn't care less about its employees. My coworkers are like me, they think that the company doesn't care. The company doesn't want anybody to go home."

The worker said her part of the warehouse continues to be overwhelmed with work following the UAW's betrayal of a five-week-long strike by Deere workers in November. "My department is so far behind, it's ridiculous. They got management in there, who know nothing. We can't turn to the union or the company; nothing would change."

A Detroit-area Faurecia auto parts worker said: "We have a problem with them not letting us know who is infected. One line had six people go down with COVID. We didn't know if they quit or what happened until we got a cell phone message [telling us they had been infected]. They got it from a hi-lo driver."

Another Detroit-area auto parts worker wrote: "I am an autoworker for IAC Warren and we are under similar conditions. Our company violates contract and our local allows them to do so. We once contacted the news because covid was bad in our plant but the news never aired our problems. We too are being over worked daily.

"We have A, B, and C shifts and we have been working 12 hours a day since June. Covid is back spreading in our plant and IAC never covered any worker when they went out on covid they told the worker to call unemployment even though the governor stated that jobs would be reimbursed for paying any worker out on covid.

"These unions are sold out and these owners of plants have no respect or concern for the welfare of the workers. Something needs to be done."

A member of the Rank-and-File Committee at Mack Trucks in Macungie, Pennsylvania said, "Management tells us nothing; the UAW says nothing. They just send out a text that there were this many cases, this many have recovered.

"The WSWS is the microphone for the working class. When you get enough workers involved, you can coordinate action. Schools need to be shut down. We need to be with them to shut it down. The scope of what we are being made to accept needs to be made known.

"The government and unions are failing us; it's so blatant. We need to build support outside of current channels among both union and nonunion facilities. People are extremely angry. It is a volatile situation; workers need a goal and a direction."



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