

“We see how the system treats working people as expendable”

Anger, grief among autoworkers following COVID death of young Chicago Ford worker

WSWS reporting team
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To tell us about conditions at your plant, email autoworkers@wsws.org. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The death of 32-year-old autoworker Caleb Dye from COVID-19 last week has evoked an outpouring of grief and anger from his coworkers at Ford’s Chicago Assembly Plant. Caleb died after a long battle against the SARS-CoV-2 virus, having been in the hospital since December 10.

This is only the latest tragic death from COVID in the auto industry. A full accounting of deaths and infections nationwide has never been published either by the United Auto Workers (UAW) or the Detroit automakers, who have systematically covered up the full extent of the spread. However, recent deaths reported by the *World Socialist Web Site* include:

- Xavier Anderson, Kevin Railey and Omie Smith of Stellantis’ Sterling Stamping Plant, the fifth worker at the Detroit-area plant to die of COVID last year;
- Monique Bowen, a worker at Sterling Heights Assembly, and her husband Anthony;
- William Domitrovitsch Jr., a worker at Mack Trucks’ Macungie, Pennsylvania plant.

Cases are also continuing to spiral out of control. At Warren Truck north of Detroit, an estimated 500 workers are out with COVID; at Sterling Heights, more than 1,000; at the Dana auto parts plant in Fort Wayne, Indiana, 140.

In response to the explosion of infections in plants and around the country, the Autoworkers Rank-and-File Safety Committee, a group of workers founded to oppose the joint management-union collusion to sacrifice health and lives for profits, has called for the shutdown of auto plants and other nonessential

industrial facilities, with full support to laid-off workers, until the pandemic is contained and a program to eliminate transmission of the disease is put in place.

Autoworkers responded thoughtfully on Facebook after seeing the WSWS report on the death of Dye. Their comments not only express grief, but anger toward the unions, the auto companies and the profit system. “RIP Brother! This should underscore how the system responds to such a thing as the pandemic,” one worker wrote on Facebook. “The system can’t bear interruptions to the way that they who have set it up have designed it.

“We live in a consumer-based society and as it is, any loss of public spending or large-scale losses of production can cause a chain of events that work against the profits of the rich that run things. It’s their system...they have set it up this way.

“We see in examples such as this how the system treats working people as expendable; how the rich and their system regards the non-wealthy. We as consumers have seen where we have been encouraged to continue to keep buying things as the lack of our consumption has resulted in losses in corporate profits.

“Caleb Mateo Dye and his fellow workers all over the nation should not have to be expendable. When faced with such a thing as a worldwide threat to public safety emerges the system should work to protect the public instead of sacrificing the public by placing profits over people. In a time where we have lost more people than all the wars in history that we have ever fought there should be a better response than what we have seen ... that’s what the suits get the big bucks for ... isn’t it?”

An autoworker from Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, where Caleb worked, wrote in to the *Autoworker*

Newsletter a day after the article on his death posted to describe the conditions at the plant. “Two weeks before this past Christmas, body shop B crew had seven positive COVID individuals on one line close to others on assembly, and not one UAW official came to the floor as we continued to work. As of right now, we probably have over 150 coworkers out because of COVID. We need a real hazmat team to come in and truly sanitize the whole plant for a couple days just to make our work environment safe for each other and our families at home.”

Another one of Dye’s coworkers wrote, “He was a good man always, fun to joke with or talk Marvel stuff with; it’s crazy knowing I won’t see him loading up my line ever again.”

Another worker wrote: “I work in a UAW auto plant, and we are never informed of COVID deaths by the company or the union. We are not given any statistics about the numbers of our members who have been sick or died. I believe the excuse given for this is privacy laws, which I think is a poor excuse.”

A retired worker from the Stellantis Jeep plant in Toledo told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “They shouldn’t be running as much as they have with the Omicron.” Of the young Ford worker who died, “He was awfully young that was pretty sad.

“Even the children of the workers at Jeep have had bad bouts with the virus,” he said.

“(UAW) Local 12 at Jeep hasn’t had a meeting in a while. All the local and international unions haven’t had meetings, they’ve shut their doors and won’t let the workers in to save themselves from the virus, but the poor workers have to go into the plant.”



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