

“They don’t care about the working class people, just the profits we make for them”

Ford Kansas City Assembly workers speak out against mass infections and deaths in the plant

Marcus Day
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The Autoworker Newsletter encourages workers to contact us and share information about conditions at your plant. Email us at autoworkers@wsws.org. Comments will be published anonymously.

COVID spreading out of control. Workers dying. Silence by management and the UAW over the sickness and death stalking workers in the plant. Conditions at the Ford Kansas City Assembly Plant (KCAP), the largest manufacturing facility in the Kansas City region, are a microcosm of the perilous situation confronting workers at auto factories, warehouses, schools and other workplaces around the US and the world.

The highly transmissible Omicron variant is continuing to ravage Kansas City, with COVID hospitalizations in both the Kansas and the Missouri sides of the metro area at or near all-time highs.

A nurse at St. Luke’s Hospital in Kansas City, describing the impact of the virus on younger patients, recently told a local NBC affiliate this week, “We have a guy in his early 20’s here, he was fortunately extubated, but he had no past medical history and he lifted weights and stuff. I can barely get him into the chair and he has a baby on the way, so that’s a lot to take away from a healthy, young, 20-year-old.” Dr. Andrew Schlachter, a pulmonologist at the hospital, told the news station, “I’m a broken doctor. So many of us are disillusioned. So many of us are at our wits end and we are so fatigued. And we worry that we don’t see the end of this in sight.”

Autoworkers, teachers, and other sections of workers have initiated rank-and-file committees, independent of the pro-company unions, in order to fight for policies to

protect workers’ lives and livelihoods. Earlier this month, a national autoworkers rank-and-file committee issued a statement calling for the shutdown of the auto plants, with full income provided to all affected workers, to stop the spread of COVID.

The WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter* spoke with workers at KCAP this week about the situation in the plant. Their names have been changed to protect them from retaliation from management or the UAW.

Kelly, a worker in the Truck Department, said, “I don’t work super close to anybody, and I’m thankful for that. Other jobs, there are three to four people in the actual truck at the same time, putting on rearview mirrors, snapping pieces together. Trim and chassis, most people are smushed together. Body shop, paint, they might be more spaced out.

“But in the bathrooms, everything is close quarters. There wasn’t even soap in the bathroom for two or three days. Everybody goes through the same turnstiles together. I don’t think Ford is taking it seriously enough. They did have a COVID temperature check outside, they took that down a while ago. There were some times, they’d be taking someone’s temperature three or four times, until eventually they’d get a reading okay enough for them to come in.

“Our masks are really flimsy too. You can blow through your mask, and feel the air. It’s so much you have to do to not get infected in there, it almost seems impossible.”

Kelly spoke about a worker who tragically died after collapsing in the plant last year, not long after he had ostensibly recovered from COVID-19. “Lamar Taylor, he

had gotten over COVID and came back to work. He collapsed, and there were workers who literally saw him hit the floor. It's not good. And Ford won't say anything about it. It's becoming so commonplace.

Deaths in the plant from lack of safety measures have become regular occurrences, she said. "Usually during every shutdown we'll have somebody pass away. There was one person in the trades, he was working on something, a pipe hit him and the water pressure killed him. So many more people are passing away. It's ridiculous. It's just crazy."

John, another worker in the Truck Department, told the WSWS, "A lot of people are sick, a lot of people have died. People are coming to work sick. You don't know who's sick. For financial reasons, people are still coming to work after testing positive for the virus. People are concerned, and afraid. The bad part of it is it's kept secret by the [United Auto Workers] and the company. But people are concerned and pretty upset in the plant because they're not being informed about who's sick, or who's dying. They just want people to keep doing production.

"They're still trying to run production," he continued. "They're having to cancel shifts, and are trying to say it's because of lack of parts, but it's people. About 100 or so part timers quit, right around before Christmas. It's real bad here. The hospitals are full, and it's getting worse."

John said he had known Lamar, the worker who had died. "He was from Ohio, and a tool and die maker. He had tested positive for COVID last year. I know he lost a lot of weight and was under a lot of stress."

Asked if the company shut down the line when he collapsed, he replied angrily, "No, they didn't stop anything. He came in on a midnight shift. People saw him fall, he collapsed right in the doorway walking in. He laid on the ground for 20 or 25 minutes. He died on his way to the hospital. I didn't realize it was Lamar at first 'cause he usually wears glasses. Someone who was there told me Lamar was trying to talk, but he couldn't get it out what he was trying to say. So that was pretty sad.

"And you know what? Ford has a medical department about 60 yards from the door, but no one's ever in the medical department. It's unbelievable. And of course, Ford and the UAW are going to try to hide, are going to try to keep it hush-hush. The building is not that old. So, the question is why wasn't anyone in the medical office? It was locked shut.

"Then we had another guy die recently, a tool guy. He passed away probably five weeks ago. He was on a ventilator for like two weeks, and then they pulled him off

and he passed away."

The UAW has done nothing to protect workers, instead protecting Ford's interests, he said. "I cannot believe the corruption in the UAW. The last three years have been a rude awakening. It's unbelievable, the corruption, the crookedness, the good old boy network. I was under the assumption for years that they were for the working man, but I found out that they're basically for the company. Sometimes I have to watch my tongue when I talk to some of them. I just hate the way they set up to my face and lie to me."

"It's unbelievable man. It's just the way...they don't care about the working-class people, just all of the profits we make for them."

John said the pandemic is a global problem. "All over the world, this is happening, this thing is worldwide. There are so many things we have to be concerned about. With this thing with the US maybe going to war with Russia, the virus, the pandemic. There's no end in sight.

"It's so bad here, the school districts, they tried to enforce the mask mandate, but the Missouri lieutenant governor said he was going to sue them to stop. It's like what you all say, they're pushing 'herd immunity.' People are going to have to come together stop this. I talk to the guys at work, and quite a few agree."

The WSWS Autoworker Newsletter is assisting autoworkers in organizing rank-and-file factory committees independent of the UAW. These committees have called for Zero COVID policies, including a shutdown of non-essential production and the payment of workers' full income during downtime, as well as other necessary public health measures to halt the pandemic and save lives. To get in touch with us about forming or joining a committee, fill out the form below:



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