

“We’re at a point where we don’t know whether we should get medicine, groceries or gas”

Chicago Ford workers speak out on impact of inflation

James Martin, Jessica Goldstein
26 April 2022

Are you an autoworker in Chicago or the Midwest? Contact us today to tell us your story as well about your working conditions, safety issues or the impact of rising gas and food prices.

Autoworkers at Ford’s Chicago Assembly Plant in the city of Chicago’s far south side spoke out recently against the difficult conditions they face with the sharp rise of prices of food and gasoline along with the dangers of war and the pandemic.

“The cost of living has gone up a lot,” said Nicole, an autoworker at the Ford plant in Chicago, and a former UPS worker. “We’re at a point where we don’t know whether we should get medicine, groceries or gas.”

Inflation and the skyrocketing price of basic goods and necessities—due in large part to disastrous government policies on the pandemic and the reckless US-NATO proxy war against Russia in the Ukraine—have fueled global demonstrations across the world. Conditions of life in the developing world have become intolerable, with mass protests shaking Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Iran, Peru and a number of other countries over the high cost of food.

In the United States, inflation has hit over 8.5 percent under the Biden administration, with the price of gasoline surging. In the UK, inflation has hit over 7 percent under the administration of Boris Johnson. The rising cost of living has also fueled mass discontent in France, which found expression in mass abstention in the election and widespread disgust with the government of Emanuel Macron.

“The four days I come to work I have half a tank of gas left,” Nicole said. But she also spoke about the

sacrifices she has to make. “Even still I have other errands to run. Between groceries and gas, it’s eating into my paycheck, and other utilities and insurance.”

Nicole also spoke out against the US-NATO war drive. “I don’t think we should have war.” Nicole also expressed interest in attending the International May Day 2022 online rally and wanted to learn more about the fight against war and social inequality.

“It’s really a struggle for me and my girlfriend,” said another autoworker heading into the plant. “We’re both struggling to get by. I’m having to heavily rely on her with the layoffs and everything.”

Ford laid off workers across numerous factories during the Omicron surge, citing a shortage of semiconductor chips. The supply of chips fell to record lows. But workers were also getting sick during the Omicron surge of the pandemic. The COVID-19 virus ravaged factories and workplaces as the Centers for Disease Control shortened the quarantine time to five days, a pro-corporate move that killed and hospitalized thousands.

“With the prices going up,” the autoworker said, “no one can afford anything. This is ridiculous. Even workers with high-paying jobs right now, whether it be iron workers, autoworkers, everyone’s struggling somehow. The companies are saying they’re struggling, but what about the workers?”

“The companies are making massive profits,” he added. “Ford Motor Company brought in over \$100 billion in revenue last year, I believe it was, and they’re not even considering raising the wages for cost of living? And the housing market from what I understand

the interest rates are going up. How are the companies like Stellantis bringing in so much money and workers aren't getting any?" he added. The \$20.5 million payout last year to the CEO of Stellantis evoked outrage among workers.

"You can't keep holding these profits from the workers," the worker added. "We're the ones that make you that money. I understand they run the business, but we deserve to be paid more. I see some of the management walk around and they act like they have a lot on the plate, but we got a lot on ours. We're trying to do what we can. They're complaining about people not showing up to work, but they're not showing up because the companies want to short us a buck or two per hour."

He also condemned the role of the two parties in defending corporate interests and promoting war. "Neither party is for the working class, Democrats or Republicans. Joe Biden doesn't have our interests in mind like he said he did.

"We shouldn't have war either. And honestly we should stay out of the war against Russia. I'm a veteran, but unfortunately I don't agree with their war policies. Too many American soldiers died and too many civilians died. It's not fair. Something's gotta change a lot. Money should be put in our paychecks. The corporations make enough money. They're not losing any profits.

"How are companies like Ford making money and they're laying workers off two to three weeks at a time?"

Another veteran autoworker added, "As far as gas goes, it's hard to try to get affordable prices. Not everybody lives around the corner. It's hard to try to get to work. I've been working here for six years. The gas prices have affected my paycheck a lot.

"I used to save a lot on gas," he said, "but now that the prices have gone up, it's very hard for us. And then we've gotten laid off and once we get laid off, I can't really do anything to make up for that."

"I think there should be a change," said another Ford worker who condemned the US-NATO war drive. "Why should it come from our tax dollars? Trillions and trillions of dollars are going overseas and there isn't anything left for us here."

Another CAP worker expressed her concerns about the dangers workers still face from the pandemic. "I'm

really concerned about health care. I actually got COVID. I have to read more about the war because I don't know too much about it, but it's a big concern."

She also spoke about working conditions at CAP. "This is a hard job period, it's exhausting. We have a lot of hours and are forced to work overtime. We had to go through layoffs, too."

Workers at the nearby Tower Automotive facility that supplies parts to Ford's Chicago assembly recently spoke out in detail about the Omicron surge's impact, denouncing the working conditions there. Tower management penalized workers with attendance points if they took precautionary measures when they had possible COVID symptoms.

Another CAP worker spoke about working conditions for herself and other workers in the plant. "In my life, and with others in the plant, we are worrying about the same things. We have to worry about personal issues, and we have to worry about attendance. We worry about how we're viewed as individuals, you know, we're really not people here, we're just numbers. It gets stressful and there are very many concerns."

When she heard about the global perspective of the International May Day rally, based on the strategy to unite the working class internationally to end the system of inequality that causes war and intolerable conditions for workers, she responded, "I'll definitely sign up on my break, it looks like something that's interesting."

We encourage all Chicago autoworkers to attend the International May Day rally on Sunday May 1, 2022 to fight against inflation, war and the pandemic with a socialist and internationalist strategy.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)