

In the aftermath of mass layoffs

Ford Rouge worker dies on the assembly line

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A worker at Ford Motor Company, Tywaun Long, collapsed and died on the assembly line Wednesday, April 17, after waiting almost half an hour for an ambulance. Co-workers who stepped in to administer CPR reported that he regained consciousness while they fought to keep him alive, but he subsequently lost consciousness and succumbed.

Supporters of the rank-and-file committee at the complex reported to the *World Socialist Web Site* that the tragedy occurred before noon, and the day shift was then sent home. Conditions at the various facilities in the complex have deteriorated since the so-called “historic” stand-up strike last fall, during which Ford President and CEO William Clay Ford, Jr. convened an unprecedented press conference to threaten the workforce with mass layoffs, which began in a staggered fashion immediately afterwards.

Lakeesha Shortridge posted the following tribute on the United Auto Workers Local 600 Facebook page:

My cousin Tywaun Long passed away today. I personally want to thank everyone who tried their best to help out. Please keep his wife, children and family in your prayers. I wish I could hug Tony Gazzarato. I hope I spelled your name correctly, brother, but thank you from the bottom of my heart! I heard about all you did and I am truly thankful.

The post received 189 responses and 91 comments and condolences within minutes, before it was taken down by the union administrator, ostensibly to consult with the family. Local 600 President and Plant Chairman Nick Kottalis said in a post, “As I get more

information, I will bring it to you.”

Apparently, Tony Gazzarato was the leader of a group of Tywuan’s colleagues who performed CPR, as they struggled, without professional support, to save their friend.

Reportedly, Tywaun knew he was sick early in the shift and sought relief but was denied.

“He asked for a medical pass and never got one,” a co-worker reported to the *World Socialist Web Site*. “Management were all in their daily meeting when it happened.”

There was no one on hand who had the training to call 911 and guide the ambulance quickly to the area of the plant where the man lay fighting for his life.

A co-worker had to call on his cell phone, and the ambulance failed to arrive for almost half an hour. As the workers struggled to save Tywaun and waited for the ambulance, Tywaun seemed to come to, but then he slumped and finally passed away.

Eyewitnesses commented on the brutal indifference of both company management and the union apparatus to the tragic death at the sprawling Rouge complex, located a few miles west of Detroit, which at one time was the crown jewel of the Ford family’s global empire.

A co-worker said:

I heard they were giving him CPR for 20 minutes. The situation was terrible. The delay was terrible. The man didn’t feel well. ... He got screwed over and could have gotten help. If he had gotten a medical pass, he might still be alive. Rumor is he came to but didn’t make it.

Many employees were so distraught that the entire day shift either walked off or were sent home before the lunch break.

By all accounts, conditions in the Dearborn Truck Plant have deteriorated rapidly since the bogus “stand-up” strike last fall. Jobs have been systematically overloaded, forcing workers to lag behind and face write-ups and victimization.

The policy of reducing the workforce has been enforced equally by management and the UAW and has produced a worsening spiral of injuries, illness and death. Under these conditions, the team leader, whose job is to fill in for a worker who must leave his station to seek medical attention, is no longer available to do so because he is already occupied filling in for someone else who called in sick or injured.

In the five days since the death of Tywaun Long, there have been two other serious, possibly life-threatening, incidents. A repairman, who was exiting a truck, fell to the floor and cracked his head on the concrete floor. Witnesses reported that blood was “spread everywhere.”

On B Crew early Tuesday morning, a woman slumped over the line in excruciating pain. She could hardly speak. Again, there was confusion and delay in finding medical help. When the ambulance finally arrived, the EMTs (emergency medical technicians) had to help the worker onto a gurney so that she could be transported out of the plant. Witnesses said she was weeping and in great pain.

Another worker described what she might have been going through:

I have had really bad pains in the past. I had nerve pain shooting from my wrist to my shoulder, then to my neck and down my spine to my tail bone. It is terrible pain. You just freeze up when it happens, with fear and anxiety. You just start crying uncontrollably. Getting help isn't easy. You just feel ashamed and embarrassed.

On the assembly lines, jobs are overloaded, workers fall behind and face write-ups and victimization. With the layoff of two entire shifts from the Rouge Electric

Vehicle Center next door to the Dearborn Truck Plant, comprising a total of 1,400 workers, the turmoil and stress on the job have become unbearable.

Over the last several months, ambulances have been called to the plant almost every day, sometimes two or three times in one day. Workers often continue to work when they feel sick because by taking leave they risk discipline, even termination. Many complain that their treatment at the nurse's station in the plant is cursory, if not useless. They might receive pain pills, for example, for a serious injury.

The conditions at Ford Rouge are not unique. On the contrary, they are developing throughout the auto industry.

Far from opposing conditions of intensifying exploitation, UAW President Shawn Fain and the union bureaucracy as a whole see their role as serving as loyal instruments of the corporations and the state.

Addressing even the most basic medical needs of workers raises the need for rank-and-file control over health and safety. This requires a rebellion against the pro-corporate UAW apparatus and the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor, organized through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) on the basis of a global socialist perspective.



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