

Ford Rouge workers denounce forced overtime, brutal speed-up after death of Tywaun Long

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Family, friends and co-workers are attending funeral services Friday morning for Tywaun Long, a worker at the Ford Dearborn Truck Plant (DTP) who collapsed and died on the assembly line on April 17. Nicknamed “Pee Wee,” Long was only 46 when he reportedly died from a heart attack.

Co-workers said Long was not feeling well and had asked to be relieved but was denied. After he collapsed, it took nearly a half hour for medical personnel to reach him. By that time Long was dead despite desperate efforts by co-workers to save him.

Since Long’s shocking death workers have been demanding answers why the relatively young worker lost his life. United Auto Workers Local 600 officials have told workers as little as possible.

Conditions on the assembly line at DTP and other plants have worsened since the sellout agreement reached by the UAW bureaucracy last year. Though it was hailed as a “record” contract by UAW President Shawn Fain and US President Joe Biden, the deal paved the way for a job massacre in the auto industry.

Next to DTP is the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center (REV-C) where 1,400 jobs and two shifts were cut. Workers have reported job overloading and ruthless speed up throughout the complex.

The workers at the Rouge, once the crown jewel of the Ford global empire, are now referred to as “surplus” according to the new UAW-Ford contract.

Another unit at the Rouge Complex, the Dearborn Diversified Manufacturing Plant (DDMP) employs just around 800 workers. Opened in 1942, it currently

produces suspension systems, axles, stampings, wheels and frames as well as heat treating and hydroforming for the F-series trucks.

Long is only the latest worker whose life was sacrificed for corporate profit. “We have been losing people because they are over-worked,” a Rouge worker told the WSW. “We have been on 12-hour days, 72 and 80 hours a week all month.”

Forced overtime was a key provision in the recent UAW contract.

“I just got bumped for the third time,’ the worker continued. “Somebody with higher seniority came from REV-C where they had all those layoffs. They put a lot of stress on you. They give you a couple of days to learn a job; and if you don’t learn it, they send you to another. If you can’t learn that one, they can terminate you.

“All these jobs used to be two-man jobs. They changed them all to one person. I’ve been working the whole month at 72 and 80 hours a week. I have a friend who works at MAP (Ford’s Michigan Assembly Plant in nearby Wayne). He knew a lot of these people who just died. A friend of his was one day from retirement when he died. He said his wife will not get anything.”

Because of company promises of transfers to the Michigan Assembly Plant, many workers have accepted layoffs in the hope of escaping the hell-hole conditions at Rouge. But supporters of the Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee report that many have been left in limbo with no guaranteed start date at the other plant.

When they ask, workers are told they have not been released from the Rouge employment roster. But no one knows for sure. “The stress is bad in the plant,”

one worker told the WSWS. Ambulances come to the plant on a daily basis, he said.

When jobs are over-loaded, the workers are routinely written up for falling behind and subsequently terminated. When a worker returns from a medical leave and there is something missing on his or her return-to-work paperwork they can be fired.

“They are creating impossible conditions,” another worker added. “They are keeping us worn out, sleep deprived, so we are too tired to understand what is happening to us. DTP is my 4th plant.”

She added, “We’ve got bosses or ‘process coaches,’ which is what they call bosses now. They will get rid of the ones that help the workers. I have seen them cry, or walk out and quit. My mind, body and soul tell me this is all the opposite of what is right. But I don’t know how to walk away. Tywaun Long could be any one of us—me and my coworkers.”

Another supporter of the Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee said he once collapsed on the assembly line due to the speed-up and forced overtime. “It could have been me,” he said of Long’s death. The only difference, he said, was that a medical team and ambulance arrived immediately and got him to the hospital within minutes.

The company asserts that the layoffs of thousands of workers are the simple product of a slump in sales, particularly EVs. But many workers doubt that is the whole story. “This was all part of a plan, no matter what cars were selling. Over-loading jobs, speeding up the line—they want to drive workers, especially the older, higher-paid ones, out of the plant,” one said.

Among workers there is also deep discontent over the Biden administration’s support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza and US imperialism’s expanding wars. UAW President Shawn Fain has become one of the leading cheerleaders for “Genocide Joe.”

“I am opposed to genocide and Israel’s war with Iran,” the rank-and-file committee member added. “The only way to stop it is to bring the world working class to power.”

As police descended to break up the encampment at the University of California Los Angeles and arrest hundreds of students, the worker recalled the events at Kent State University in Ohio in 1970 when four students were shot to death by national guard troops and many more were wounded.

“I remember Dick Gregory at Kent State,” the worker told the WSWS. “He denounced the murders and mocked the government saying, ‘We [the Nixon government] have a plan: instead of educating the people, we’ll indoctrinate them.’ The whole mechanism of the educational system is set up against us. We have to educate the working class on what is really going on.”

“Ford Motor Company and all the corporations are global conglomerates. We have to get the whole mass of the working class to rise up and take control of our own destiny,” he concluded.

Workers can have no confidence that the UAW bureaucracy will bring out the truth about Long’s sudden death. The UAW apparatus is tied by a million threads to the corporation and the joint labor-management safety committees are designed more to cover up the truth rather than bring it to light.

Workers must demand the release of all information about Long’s death, including why the ambulance was delayed. At the same, the Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee must be expanded and united with other committees in the US and around the world to fight job cuts and exert workers’ control of line speed and health and safety. This fight is being coordinated by the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

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