

“Ford and big companies don’t care if you live or not”

Ford workers speak out on Kentucky Truck worker’s death

By Jessica Goldstein and Jerry White
14 December 2017

Family and friends gathered at a “Life Celebration” memorial Wednesday to pay tribute to Ivan Bridgewater, a 41-year-old electrician who was killed at Ford’s Kentucky Truck Plant (KTP) in Louisville shortly before 1:00 a.m. on Saturday, December 9. The event for the father of a two-year-old was held in his hometown of Seymour, Indiana, 84 miles north of Louisville, and was attended by family, friends and co-workers from the factory.

Jefferson County Deputy Coroner Steve Moran said in an email Wednesday that Bridgewater died from a blunt force trauma and ruled the death an accident. This contradicts initial reports by Louisville police that Bridgewater was electrocuted. The exact circumstances of his death remain undetermined, and it could take up to six months for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to issue a report from its investigation.

The WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* contacted the United Auto Workers (UAW) and Ford seeking more details about the death. A spokeswoman at UAW Local 862, who refused to identify herself, told the WSWS, “You will have to speak to Ford Motor Company. The union has no comment. The investigation is not over with and we won’t say anything until it is completed.” Asked how long that could take, she said, “I don’t know.”

The WSWS also called the Labor Relations Department at the Kentucky Truck Plant and left a message requesting more information about Bridgewater’s death. Corporate managers have not returned the call.

The tragedy has sparked widespread anger and concern among autoworkers. A *World Socialist Web*

Site article reporting Bridgewater’s death has been shared by workers nearly 20,000 times on social media and has provoked scores of comments on hazardous conditions, speed up, the lack of serious enforcement by OSHA and the collusion of the UAW with the auto bosses.

The sprawling truck plant, which employs more than 8,000 workers, is operating around-the-clock, churning out highly profitable pickups and sports utility vehicles for Ford, which beat Wall Street expectations with \$1.7 billion in third quarter profits and expectations of \$9 billion in 2017 earnings.

Analysts have attributed the company’s high profits to a campaign of cost-cutting, which has been aided and abetted by the UAW. The UAW pushed through a pro-company labor agreement in 2015 that expanded the number of temporary part-time workers and maintained the two-tier wage and benefit system and 10-hour Alternative Work Schedules. The UAW has also sanctioned the combining of trades, forcing skilled workers, like Bridgewater, to work under enormous pressure and do complicated repair and maintenance work alone.

With anger boiling over, UAW Vice President James Settles issued a perfunctory statement Monday about Bridgewater’s death, informing workers that “UAW Representatives from the National Joint Health & Safety Committee are onsite leading the safety investigation, while local law enforcement officials are investigating the circumstances of Mr. Bridgewater’s death.” Any such investigation by the joint labor-management safety committee will be a whitewash of the company and cover up the complicity of the UAW. This only means that the hazardous

conditions will continue.

In 2009, 54-year-old Ronald Cassady, millwright with 16 years at the Kentucky Truck Plant, died from multiple blunt force injuries after he was struck in the head and chest by an I-beam. The only fine OSHA issued to Ford that year was a workplace safety or health violation for \$10,000.

While rank-and-file workers have widely shared the WSWS articles, Local UAW 862 officials and their toadies in the plants have denounced the WSWS and the *Autoworker Newsletter* for “fake news,” characterizing workers at KTP and the nearby Louisville Assembly Plant (LAP) who have given statements to the WSWS as “disgruntled employees.”

One worker posted the following:

“If you want verify the truth of this article go to a restaurant called STOOGES by Louisville Assembly plant... It’s where KTP and LAP workers hang out, grab a burger, and just listen to what they say. They’re the ones on the floor everyday... Safety sucks... We call UNION (Pinocchio) UNION because when they talk their noses grows just like Pinocchio’s did when he didn’t tell truth!!!”

“My thoughts and prayers are with the family during this time, may they find peace and strength. Where there is a trend (2 electricians being killed on the job) that points to a culture that emphasizes production over all else,” he said, telling a UAW officials to “Take a long look in the mirror.”

Another worker cited the previous comments of a Ford worker, “Nobody’s safety is worth sacrificing to make their cars and their profits,” and added, “It’s the “UAW-Ford Joint Committee on the Health and Safety of UAW and Ford.”

Another worker wrote, “As someone who lost a best friend to horrible circumstances, I know what the family goes through. So very sorry...”

Another added, “OSHA has been an anti-worker joke as anyone who has been speeded up knows. The remedy to these fatalities is to hire more electricians. But that takes a real Union to win of course.”

A KTP worker posted: “And electricians still not locking out at KTP. Our first day back to work and they are doing the same thing. They lock out at the door entrance at the robot cell, but they never kill the power.”

A Canadian autoworker wrote, “When are people

going to realize Ford and big [companies] don’t care if you live or not. To them you’re just a number and can be replaced in a minute!!!! So if you don’t take it upon yourself to work safe the company doesn’t.

“Unions in the USA are bought by management. The leaders are elites who attend Ivy League universities and receive capitalist indoctrination at said places. They no longer refer to themselves as Secretary Generals of unions. Instead they are General Managers, CEOs and CFOs of unions.”

Another Canadian worker wrote to the WSWS: “Two St. Catharines GM maintenance workers have died in the past couple of weeks due to asbestos related diseases. A retired pipefitter died a couple of weeks ago due to asbestosis, and a welder died at the beginning of this week due to mesothelioma. During the previous couple of months two women assembly workers died from lung cancer due to asbestos exposure. One had an allowed worker’s compensation claim, and the other did not but her son intends to file one on behalf of the estate. Both worked with asbestos brake linings for years. I worked in the same operation as them but for a much shorter time.”

Underscoring the continuous industrial carnage, just two days after Bridgewater’s death, Alfred Cadena, 61, was crushed and killed at the ArcelorMittal steel mill in East Chicago, Illinois about 1:28 a.m. Monday morning.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>