

Nurses, farmworkers, autoworkers strike for safe working conditions

# Detroit Fiat Chrysler workers halt production for second day to demand COVID-19 protection

By Jessica Goldstein  
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Workers continued their courageous production stoppage at the Fiat Chrysler Jefferson North Assembly Plant (JNAP) in Detroit on Friday. Workers on “B crew” entered the plant at 4:30 p.m. and refused to work under conditions where basic safety and health protocols, including social distancing measures and cleaning guidelines, are being flouted by the corporation and the United Auto Workers union (UAW) in order to maximize profits.

Production at the plant remained at a standstill due to the workers’ action against the corporation and the UAW and a lack of labor due to the refusal of workers to report for work out of legitimate health concerns.

The production halt at the plant, which employs 5,000 people, began Thursday at noon when workers on “A crew” stopped work after hearing that at least three coworkers had tested positive for COVID-19.

Workers on “B crew” continued the work stoppage from 4:30 p.m. Thursday until nearly 2 a.m. Friday morning, when management and UAW officials tried to force some workers back onto the line. But “C crew” workers continued the struggle after they arrived at the plant at around 3:30 a.m. Friday morning. Workers have posted videos to appeal for support, one of which has over 1,600 views on Twitter alone.

The workers are taking action independently of and in opposition to the UAW, resuming the struggle carried out in March by autoworkers in Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Ontario, Canada, who refused to work under unsafe conditions and forced the shutdown of the auto industry in North America for nearly two months.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* was the first to report the work stoppage at JNAP after being alerted by workers at the plant as it developed in an article that reached tens of thousands of workers within hours. The wildcat action was blacked out by the national media and first reported by local news outlets only on Friday afternoon. Those reports repeated the dubious claims of management that there were no confirmed cases of the virus in the plant.

The critical struggle of JNAP workers unfolds under conditions of growing militancy and resistance by workers in the face of the ruling class assault on the lives and rights of working people in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. The back-to-work drive, spearheaded by Trump but implemented at the state and local level by Democratic officials, continues unabated even as its catastrophic consequences are seen in record high daily infections and an explosion of hospitalizations in states across the country.

The outright criminality of the policies of the ruling elite and both of its parties is fueling the growth of conscious opposition to capitalist exploitation among broad layers of workers. This is a world process, as capitalist governments internationally are pursuing the same homicidal policy of “herd immunity” and sparking anger and opposition among workers throughout the world.

As one Fiat Chrysler worker at the Kokomo Transmission plant in Indiana told the *Autoworker Newsletter*: “They are exposing all of us to this virus for the almighty dollar. You can’t put a price on a life. Our lives are worth more than a transmission. Nobody

is buying cars right now anyway. It's sad that they put transmissions over lives.”

The corporate ruling class has restarted production across the world in the absence of mass testing and contact tracing protocols in the majority of countries, putting workers' lives, health and safety on the line for profits produced in the factories, warehouses, retail outlets, hospitals, meatpacking plants, farms, offices and other workplaces.

But workers are increasingly fighting back. A group of 50 agricultural workers at pistachio producer Primex Farms near Wasco, California has been on strike since Thursday to demand free face masks, gloves and transparency about confirmed positive cases. The workers organized the strike after learning through local television news that 31 farmworkers at the company had contracted COVID-19. They had been told nothing about the infections by the company, which owns 5,000 acres of pistachio orchards in California in addition to other nut and dried fruit facilities.

One thousand nurses and support staff who are members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 121RN at Riverside Community Hospital in California have struck against HCA Healthcare. They are opposing the imposition of pay cuts, chronic short-staffing and the lack of high-quality personal protective equipment (PPE) to protect medical personnel and staff from the risk of contracting COVID-19.

On June 19, 32,000 auto parts workers in Matamoros, Mexico carried out a wildcat strike against Tridonex Cardone after learning that two coworkers had died after having likely been infected with COVID-19. The workers demanded more information and that the facilities be closed until safety conditions have been met.

In these actions, the workers come into irreconcilable conflict with the capitalist system and the trade unions, which are collaborating in the back-to-work drive and helping enforce unsafe conditions. The unions seek to isolate from each other workers around the world who work for the same corporations and are fighting against the same capitalist system for the same job and health protections against a virus that recognizes no national boundaries.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on all autoworkers

in the US and internationally to come to the support of the JNAP workers and to spread the fight to the entire industry.

Central to this is the fight for workers to take the struggle into their own hands independently of the trade unions. The WSWS calls for workers to establish rank-and-file safety committees, democratically organized and controlled, to fight for demands that protect the health and economic security of all workers. These should include the shutdown of all nonessential industry until the pandemic is over, full compensation for lost income, full health care benefits, the right to a safe workplace, the highest-quality PPE and free medical care for workers who fall ill.

The committees will be able to monitor conditions in the plants and demand reduced line speeds, air conditioning and adequate rest. They will communicate and coordinate with workers and plants across the country and around the world, and, where necessary, halt production to protect the safety and health of the workers.

US workers must unite with their brothers and sisters around the world to demand the measures needed to halt the pandemic and save lives—measures that will not be carried out by capitalist governments because those governments serve the interests of the corporate-financial elites, which are in conflict with science, international collaboration and the marshaling of the resources required to stop the pandemic.

The struggle for workers' basic rights is a political struggle against the capitalist system.

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>