

Workers in Germany express their solidarity with striking Fiat Chrysler workers

By our correspondents
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The strikes at two Detroit Fiat Chrysler plants, Jefferson North and Sterling Heights, against intolerable health and safety conditions for production workers have met a powerful response from workers in Germany. Many workers from different industries expressed their solidarity on social media with the protests aimed at securing adequate protections against coronavirus infection, which have been fiercely opposed by the company management and the union.

When Zafer, a Ford worker in Cologne, heard about the attacks on FCA colleagues in the US, he immediately responded: “The union and works council always let you down. It’s the same everywhere.”

He reported that certain minimum standards were being observed at his workplace. Masks have been distributed and the body temperature of workers measured at the entrance gate. “If we had a case of corona, things would get hectic here too,” he said. “We’ve had a few cases so far at Ford, but none in my section.”

“Colleagues in the United States should have the right to organise and take responsibility for their health.” He stressed, “If there are corona cases, something has to be done, health comes first. It’s not a laughing matter. I would do the same. If I lose my life, nobody can give it back to me.”

Zafer was not surprised by the threats from management against auto workers taking action. “This is a big problem, the leaders of protests are always threatened, so that others get scared and do not fight for their rights. It’s blackmail. You have to take action.” He emphasized that behind unsafe conditions and job cuts was the drive to profit. “Profits have to be right, production must be maintained, that’s how it is. We have heard rumours that Ford wants to cut an additional 5,000 jobs because of the corona crisis,” he reported.

There has also been great solidarity on the part of Amazon workers. Many employees are themselves on strike to demand adequate protection against infection. Günther Schachtmann has been working at the mail order giant for 21 years and sees clear parallels with the situation confronting Fiat Chrysler workers: “It’s outrageous that 86 of the Amazon workers in Hamburg tested positive and the factory was not closed for a second, nor were all employees tested. The same thing in Hersfeld. Workers have not even been informed about which departments were affected,” Schachtmann said. “If two people test positive in a cruise ship, all 3,000 on board are put into quarantine. Why is it different in workplaces? It is a mockery.”

Schachtmann expressly supported the fact that workers at Fiat Chrysler have organised themselves independently of the unions to defend their interests. “Unions are not unlike the corporations. So, of course, these workers’ committees could be a step forward.”

Support has also come from many other workers. Peter, who is employed as a ramp worker for Star Alliance airlines, wrote: “I have heard about the spontaneous strikes at Fiat Chrysler—and of course I support the people who want to work there in safety.”

The nurse Heidi Biebrach said: “It has always been the case with exploitation and health: as long as employers earn money and are not themselves affected, it doesn’t matter. As soon as they are in danger themselves and can’t spend their money, they do something.”

Mathias Fuchs from Rostock wrote to the WSWS when he learned about the strikes at Fiat Chrysler: “It must be a basic requirement for workers to work in safety at the company. The action committees are therefore very good and important. They can set safety standards that are beneficial for all workers. They

ensure that, in the face of the pandemic, workers do not fall ill or injure themselves. It's not acceptable when bosses think workers are all replaceable and then run the risk of workers being injured or getting sick. Keep it up. It's the right way to a better future."

The WSWS is continuing to collect solidarity addresses and supports the establishment of rank-and-file safety committees. Contact the WSWS Auto Workers Newsletter by email at auto@gleichheit.de.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>