

Ford Chicago Assembly workers launch Rank-and-File Safety Committee to save lives

By the Ford Chicago Assembly Rank-and-File Safety Committee
12 August 2020

The WSWW Autoworker Newsletter stands ready to assist autoworkers and other workers in establishing safety committees at their own workplaces. Email the WSWW Autoworker Newsletter at autoworkers@wsws.org to learn more.

Brothers and sisters at Ford Chicago Assembly Plant: We are faced with a life-and-death situation each day that we work on the assembly lines. Workers are being infected with COVID-19 at the plant, and Ford management along with the United Auto Workers union is trying to cover it up. Our coworkers are falling ill and even dying, but management and the union refuse to tell us the truth about how many have been exposed to or become infected with COVID-19.

Illinois Democratic Governor Pritzker is moving full steam ahead with his economic reopening plan, even though daily case counts, deaths and test positivity rates have increased over the past month in Illinois and northwest Indiana. There have been 196,948 total confirmed infections and 7,657 fatalities in Illinois, with terrible consequences for the families affected.

We are being forced to work under unsafe conditions to make profits and pay off Ford's multi-billion dollar corporate debt, or given the "choice" of unemployment, evictions and hunger. We are given flimsy masks to wear that break and fall off and are difficult to breathe in. We are working elbow-to-elbow with each other on assembly and subassembly lines and are packed in on meal breaks, bathroom breaks and shift changes when it is impossible to maintain a safe social distance.

Workers are having panic attacks. We have to be near one another, always hypervigilant, questioning if we'll be safe, if this or that person could have the virus, if we'll be taking it home to our families and friends. We know it's in the plant, and it's coming for us, until we

come together to fight against the conditions that are causing it to spread.

We all know that the so-called "safety measures" put in place by the company with the blessings of the union are a joke. Symptom questionnaires and temperature checks are not enough. We know that these measures do not rule out asymptomatic cases. We are told to clean our own workstations, but are not given enough time to clean or even wash our hands.

Safety problems that existed at the plant before COVID-19 have not been addressed. We are still breathing in weld dust and fumes. Rats and bugs still crawl over the factory floors and in the cafeteria. We still lack proper ventilation and air conditioning to keep us cool. We are not given enough water to stay hydrated on hot days. Even machinery is not maintained until something breaks down.

We know that the UAW will not stand up for us. That is why we, the rank-and-file workers at CAP, must take matters into our own hands to organize the fight for our right to a safe and comfortable workplace.

We put forth the following demands:

1. All workers must be notified of any cases of COVID-19 and what areas have been affected. This information must not be kept hidden from workers.
2. When there's a case confirmed, the factory should be closed for at least 24 hours for deep cleaning, not just the affected area, but the whole plant. Preventative maintenance and daily sanitizing is vital to ensure a safe and comfortable working environment.
3. All areas of the plant must be sanitized regularly and all equipment must be cleaned on breaks by a designated cleaning crew trained in the proper procedures. The areas of the plant where we work must be properly ventilated and cooled for our safety.
4. Social distancing must be implemented at all

times—when entering and leaving the plant and during bathroom, lunch and other break times. Disinfectant and cleaning equipment must remain readily available and stocked for workers to use as they see fit.

5. We demand all lines be stopped for at least 10 minutes every hour for workers to take off their masks, stay hydrated and cool down. Our health and lives are far more important than Ford's profits. We have the right to stop and begin work as we see fit based on safety conditions.

6. We must have access to universal daily testing with rapid results and the highest-quality health care if either one of us or our family members becomes ill, all paid for by Ford. Daily, high quality testing in addition to contact tracing are the only ways proven to effectively control the spread of the pandemic.

7. We will not accept that workers face any retaliation in the form of write ups, harassment, layoffs or other types of intimidation if they get tested for the virus or get sick. Workers who feel ill or have to quarantine must receive full pay and not be penalized for staying home.

8. Stop misusing and abusing temp workers to fill in production shifts when workers regularly scheduled stay home for their own health and safety. All workers in the plant deserve the right to a safe and comfortable workplace and the best health care possible. All workers must receive adequate paid time off benefits regardless of full time or part time status or seniority.

9. The inhumane working hours and schedules must stop. We cannot stay healthy if we are fatigued. We demand a return to a fully-paid eight hour day, with adequate breaks, with at least two days off per week for rest and leisure.

10. Whenever conditions are not safe, we have the right to refuse to work without any threat of retaliation by management or the union.

If you work at CAP and agree to these demands, join us, and join the movement which was started by our brothers and sisters at Fiat Chrysler Jefferson North, Sterling Heights, Toledo Jeep and Ford Dearborn Truck.

We, the rank-and-file workers, are the only ones who will fight for our safety. Everybody knows the UAW won't fight for them. Neither will the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, or the National Labor Relations Board, or the Democratic or

Republican Parties. Autoworkers everywhere are suffering from the same problems at the same time. We do have rights, and we don't have to stand for these injustices.

If you work at another plant, form a rank-and-file safety committee to link up with ours. This is our fight, we the workers are the only force that can stop the virus and save lives worldwide!

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>