

In the aftermath of the 2023 UAW sellout contract

Workers denounce UAW collusion as accidents and deaths plague Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn, Michigan

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Autoworkers: tell us what conditions at your plant are like. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

On Monday evening, August 5, production was halted at Ford's flagship Dearborn Truck Plant (DTP) when a forklift breached an overhead pipe unleashing a torrent of water that spread through the trim department. This was the second time in just eight weeks that the same pipe was ruptured causing a flood and extended shutdown. As maintenance scrambled to clean up the chaotic mess, production was paralyzed for four hours between 8:50 p.m. and 12:45 a.m.

The hi-lo driver, who evidently had been rushed into the job at shift change without adequate training, pierced the massive water line when a fork passed beyond the bin of parts she was lifting from a stack. As of this writing, there is no word on her fate. But Ford managers scapegoated the driver from the previous flood and gave her 30 days off without pay. UAW Local 600 under Nick Kottalis, Dearborn Truck president and plant chairman, folded its hands and did nothing.

A worker commented. "I have never seen this much chaos in so short a time. It can be mind-boggling." He said wire harnesses for the F-150 trucks built at the plant were soaked. "Workers were squeezing water out of them like a wet towel."

A number of workers have been fired for posting photographs and comments describing the dangerous conditions on social media.

Conditions have gotten so bad that fights have broken out on the shop floor and police have been called on a daily basis. Rather than oppose the conditions in the

plant behind these tensions, Kottalis has blamed the workers, recently posting on the union Facebook page a message warning that the union will not protect their jobs if the company accuses them of fighting.

Since the sellout 2023 labor agreements signed by the United Auto Workers union, thousands of Ford, GM and Stellantis workers have lost their jobs while those remaining face virtually limitless mandatory overtime and speed-up.

The 2023 UAW agreement with Ford and the other Big Three automakers, hailed by UAW President Shawn Fain and US President Joe Biden as "record contracts," has given the companies a green light for massive job cutting and intensifying the exploitation of the workers who remain.

Even before the UAW bureaucracy rammed through the sweetheart contracts, Ford President William Clay Ford Jr. took the unprecedented step of convening a press conference to threaten every job at the Rouge complex. What followed was "rolling" layoffs of the B and C crews at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center.

Before the ink was dry on the 2023 sellout, the UAW allowed Ford to slash more than 1,400 jobs from the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center adjacent to DTP. This came on the heels of cutting the third shift (C Crew) at DTP that took place some months before the contract.

A worker commented on the company's ruthless drive to increase production with fewer workers. "When they are short-staffed, they are in a rush and they send people to where they need them. They keep putting operators on forklifts that do not know the job. They are not trained for the job and have no

orientation.” He continued, “The supervisors are running around at shift change trying to find people to fill empty spots.”

Kottalis has played an especially sinister role—at first denying the vast extent of the layoffs, then promising every worker a guaranteed job at another facility, and finally misrepresenting the actual dates on which employees would be let go. Everything was done by the union, in collusion with management, to prevent organized resistance by the rank and file to the company’s carefully planned attacks, including the imposition of layoffs, forced overtime, speed-up and job over-loading.

As a consequence of these conditions, there has been an increase in absenteeism. On July 29, 24 operators from one line were absent. Then on Wednesday, 35 called off. The workers agreed that “those numbers are extremely high for one line in trim.”

Four weeks after the cuts took place, as the stress of forced overtime was being more severely felt, Tywaun Long, a worker in the prime of his life, died of a massive heart attack on the assembly line in the exact same location as the pipe break that just occurred. His co-workers reported at the time that medical staff in the plant had turned him away when he appealed for help and ordered him to return to work on the line. Tywaun, also known as “Pe Wee,” did not smoke or drink or use drugs of any kind.

Co-workers, who found him collapsed in a truck, struggled to revive him without an ambulance or professional medical assistance of any kind for almost half an hour. They said at the time there was no defibrillator available and that Tywaun never regained consciousness or showed vital signs before EMTs put him on a stretcher and removed him from the plant.

To evade responsibility for the death, the company, with the tacit support of the union, asserted that he died at the Corewell Hospital in Dearborn. But many circumstances suggest Tywaun died in the plant, and a raft of questions remain unanswered. As part of its cover-up, the company placed a defibrillator on the line within 72 hours of Long’s death.

In the aftermath of Long’s death, a colleague at DTP described the tragic suicide of a young worker who suffered a neck injury on the job and underwent three successive surgeries to relieve the excruciating pain. When he couldn’t stand it any longer, he took his own

life.

A worker from Dearborn Diversified Manufacturing Products reported to the *World Socialist Web Site* that another employee had suffered a similar untimely death at DDM, another operation in the sprawling Rouge complex. There, the employees are compelled to put in 70- and 80-hour workweeks.

To oppose these conditions, workers must join and build the Ford Rouge Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which is completely independent of the UAW. In this way, the fight to defend jobs and safe working conditions can be linked up with rank-and-file workers in other plants who are organizing through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

The new allegations of corruption and reports of a “culture of fear and retaliation” under the Fain administration underscore the importance of the demand by the IWA-RFC and *World Socialist Web Site* for new UAW elections and for putting the structures in place to guarantee their legitimacy. The need for new elections is underscored by the recent federal court ruling in favor of the lawsuit by Mack Trucks worker and socialist Will Lehman against the US Labor Department, demanding an investigation of voter suppression during the UAW election of 2022, when Lehman ran against Fain.

The call for new elections must be combined with a fight to overturn the sellout contracts and fight all layoffs and plant closures. Rank-and-file committees must fight for the rehiring of all part-time and full-time workers, a halt to mandatory overtime and weekend work, the expansion of paid time off, ending punitive attendance policies and workers’ control of line speed and safety.



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