

“The eight-hour day is a thing of the past”

UAW sanctions “alternative” work schedule at Chrysler

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In an effort to pump ever-greater productivity and profits out of auto workers, Chrysler is implementing a so-called Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) at its stamping, assembly and parts plants throughout the country. The schedule, which has been sanctioned by the United Auto Workers union, establishes regular 10-hour work days with no overtime pay.

The AWS is also known as the 3-2-120 schedule because three crews work two shifts for 120 hours a week. At the Jefferson North Assembly plant in Detroit, the “A” crew works 10 hours a day on day shift from 6 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday. The “B” crew works 10 hours on night shift 6 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. on Wednesday through Saturday. The “C” crew works 10 hours on the night shift Monday and Tuesday and 10 hours on the day shift Friday and Saturday.

The schedule, which was imposed by the Obama administration in the 2009 restructuring of Chrysler and GM, allows the company to run its plant longer, adding the equivalent of an extra 49 days of production annually compared with traditional plant schedules.

It also allows the company—whose third-quarter profits jumped 80 percent to \$381 million—to cut tens of millions in labor costs by eliminating overtime payments for working more than a 40-hour week and on Saturday, which previously paid time and a half.

Under the new schedule, the paid lunch break—won by auto workers decades ago—has also been eliminated. This is on top of other break time reductions imposed in the 2009 auto industry restructuring.

With the elimination of the eight-hour day and the slashing of new hires’ wages in half, the auto companies are turning the clock backwards to the

sweatshop conditions that prevailed before the sit-down strikes that established the UAW in the 1930s. This time, however, the conditions of brutal exploitation are being enforced by the UAW, which owns 41.5 percent of Chrysler’s corporate stock.

On this basis, the automaker is adding thousands of new, lower-paid workers to plants in Michigan and other states.

The new schedules have provoked widespread anger among workers. Angry workers have confronted union officials at meetings, blogs have been set up, petitions gathered and there is talk of wildcat strikes. In one forum of Chrysler workers in Kokomo, Indiana, a worker denounced the top UAW International officials, saying, “I hope there is a special place in Hell reserved for Nate Gooden, Brian Harlow, Holiefield, and Bressler.”

Antoine, a second-tier worker at Sterling Heights Assembly in suburban Detroit told the *World Socialist Web Site* that workers at his plant are already working 10 hours a day, six days a week. “They have us working all kinds of crazy schedules right now. A lot more people are complaining than liking it. The only time we go home early is when something breaks down.

“They are all full of crap—the union and plant management. The union is helping Chrysler with anything they want to do. People aren’t stupid and blind. I have a feeling that people are going to walk out on a strike that the union doesn’t approve.”

He spoke about the two-tier wage system, “They threw in a little raise to try and make you think there is something right. But we can see straight through that. I think the union has a conflict of interest in that it owns

so much of Chrysler. There definitely needs to be another organization.”

Bonnie, a worker at the Warren Truck assembly plant with 12 years, said that the 10-hour schedule is set to be implemented in her plant in March. “We are not looking forward to it. They are saying they want it corporation-wide. It is all for the company. The union didn’t do anything.

“Me and my husband work for Chrysler. We have kids. With the ABC shift we don’t know how days and times will work and how to construct our schedule with the kids. Everything is unclear. It is not going to be good. We are already exhausted from all the overtime. This is another obstacle.

“Why do we even have a local union? They don’t do a damn thing. You can’t even get clean bathrooms. The toilets don’t work. There is no hot water. We have to bring in soap from the dollar store. Its disgusting.”

Nancy, a worker with 13 years at Warren Truck, said, “This new shift is crazy. It’s such a long time that you have to work as it is and they want it to be 10 hours. An eight-hour day is a thing of the past. I’m a woman and it can be hectic keeping up with the line speed and the lifting. Now it will be worse.

“They say you’re going to get three days off—but then you’re going to have to load up everything from the week into those days. My house is already a mess. People with kids are going to have to hire baby sitters for the extra hours.

“The UAW went right along with this. It’s not like it was back in the day, the union doesn’t stand up for you. Now they let the company get away with everything.”

Carolyn, also at Warren Truck, said, “We’re already working nine hours a day, six days a week. But now they are going to take away overtime and that’s going to hit a lot of people hard.

“The way I see it Fiat (which owns Chrysler) is squeezing as much production out of us now but I expect they are going to lay us off soon. We’re not stupid. We see that they are hiring as many second-tier workers as possible and in the next contract the company hopes they’ll vote to reduce the higher paid workers’ wages in exchange for another small increase for the tier-two workers.

“The UAW International doesn’t work for us. [UAW Vice President General] Holiefield got married in

Italy—I can’t even afford a cruise to the Caribbean. Maybe Fiat paid for the wedding—somebody had to.

“This is a global thing. The companies are trying to bring conditions here like in Mexico, China or Indonesia. They’re telling us ‘be happy you got a damn job.’ Well, with all the unemployment in Detroit a lot of young workers feel that way. It’s like the system is keeping us as slaves or indentured servants. It doesn’t matter whether it’s the Democrats or Republicans. They’re letting people starve; there aren’t any full time jobs and young people are coming out of college with huge debt. Capitalism has gone way too far. I’ll be glad when the revolution starts.”



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