

Forced overtime at Dundee, Michigan Chrysler plant as layoffs hit

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Forced overtime, including 12-hour shifts, is continuing at the Chrysler Dundee Engine Plant in southeastern Michigan in the wake of the imposition of a sellout local contract last fall by the United Auto Workers (UAW).

The terms of the local agreement allow Chrysler to bypass language in the national contract that places certain limits on forced overtime for some 615 workers in the bargaining unit. Instead, Chrysler has been imposing six- and seven-day workweeks at 12 hours a day.

The forced overtime has continued at the north plant, which builds the Tiger Shark engine, even as Chrysler recently laid off the second shift at the south plant due to slumping demand for the Fiat 500 engine.

Workers at the plant overwhelmingly rejected a local agreement last August that put in place work rules that would perpetuate virtually unlimited amounts of forced overtime at the facility. After the initial rejection, the UAW forced a revote, threatening workers that unless they ratified the agreement, the plant would close. In the second vote, the UAW obtained passage of the agreement by a relatively narrow 65 percent margin.

A veteran engine plant worker, who wished to remain anonymous, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I can’t understand how they ratified the local contract. It was voted down by 72 percent and the union came around and threatened us, and the next vote it was ratified. They don’t have the best interests of the workers at heart.”

The facility was originally operated as a joint venture between Chrysler, Hyundai and Mitsubishi. But Chrysler bought out its partners and the facility came under its total ownership in 2009. In 2011, the Dundee Engine Plant workers were placed under the national UAW-Chrysler contract.

“We are working pretty much every Saturday with a 6-2-120 schedule with six crews,” the engine worker explained. “They have a special crew that just runs the Tiger Shark. There is a minimum of 46 hours a week—we work 12 hours a day, but only get paid for 11 and a half because we are not paid for our lunch break.

“We are at critical plant status even though the company has not done the paperwork to declare us a critical plant. That way they don’t have to give us the 35 cent per hour premium, the half-hour paid lunch and three additional PA days that they would have to give us under the contract if we were officially declared a critical plant. How the union lets them get away with it I have no idea. They are in bed with the company.”

About one half of the workers at the engine plant were hired in at the lower, second-tier wage, which currently stands at the near-poverty level of \$15 an hour.

In addition, there are large numbers of contract workers in the plant earning as little as \$8-\$10 an hour.

“It makes for animosity between the workers,” said the worker. “I can understand the way they feel.”

In the wake of the forced revote at the engine plant, workers circulated a petition calling for the removal of the bargaining committee members who had negotiated the local agreement. The UAW attempted to intimidate those circulating the petition, saying it would have the company fire them.

“A lot of people are upset with the union officials at the plant,” explained the worker. “The plant chairman is trying to appoint biddable jobs. For example, there is a lube route coming up that is a biddable position, which would normally go to the person with the highest seniority. But that hasn’t happened. The plant chairman says he can appoint who he wants, which means he is trying to take care of his buddies.”

“Since the union owns part of the company, it is in the union officials’ interests to have workers do what the company wants, so they can have higher profits and make their stock go up. How can you have a union represent you if you own stock in the company?”

The conditions at the Dundee Engine Plant illustrate the way the auto companies have increased their profits through the destruction of the jobs, wages and working conditions of auto workers. Forced into bankruptcy in 2009, Chrysler and General Motors are now reporting record profits.

The 10-hour workday is becoming the norm as the auto companies move to impose four-day, 10-hour schedules with no overtime paid after 8 hours. At several plants, including the Jefferson North assembly plant in Detroit, Chrysler has a “3-2-120” schedule in place, where three crews work two 10-hour shifts per day, including weekends, at straight time. Chrysler plans to implement the 3-2-120 schedule at the Warren Truck assembly plant north of Detroit in March. The move has evoked an angry response from workers at Warren Truck, who initiated a petition opposing the new work schedule.

Ford has imposed a similar work schedule at some of its facilities. At the Michigan Assembly plant, located in Wayne, west of Detroit, Ford runs two 10-hour shifts, paid at straight time, including weekends, often with an additional half-hour of overtime per shift.

All of these attacks are being carried out with the full collaboration and support of the UAW, which acts as management enforcer inside the plants. The response of union officials to the growing anger and militancy of workers over these conditions has been to try to suppress and silence opposition.



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