

UAW sanctions elimination of the eight-hour day at Chrysler

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The old bumper stickers used to say, “Unions: The folks who brought you the weekend.” A more accurate version today would read, “The UAW: The folks who gave away the weekend—and the eight-hour day.”

With its support for the so-called Alternative Work Schedule, the UAW is overseeing the destruction of basic protections won by autoworkers 75 years ago and joining in the corporate effort to pump ever-greater profits from auto workers.

The new schedule, which is in operation at many plants across the country, is being implemented at Chrysler’s truck assembly and stamping plant in the Detroit suburb of Warren next week. The new schedule has provoked widespread anger among workers.

Under the AWS, workers will work at least 10 hours a day without overtime, and most workers will be compelled to work Saturdays at straight time. At Chrysler’s North Jefferson Assembly plant, periodic Sunday work at straight time has also been scheduled.

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., 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.

It allows the company—whose 2012 profits jumped to \$1.7 billion—to cut tens of millions in labor costs by eliminating overtime payments for working more than an eight-hour day and on Saturdays, which previously paid time-and-a-half.

The schedule allows the company to operate its plants longer, adding the equivalent of an extra 49 days of production annually compared with traditional plant schedules.

The right of auto workers to be paid overtime after eight hours was won in the bitter 1941 strike at Ford. During the 2009 restructuring of GM and Chrysler, the Obama administration demanded the elimination of that provision and the UAW agreed to it.

Every study shows that extended work hours and swing shifts are detrimental to the health of workers, adding physical and mental stress and disrupting their family lives. But none of this is of any concern to the auto execs and their UAW business partners.

By extending the workday, shortening breaks, freezing wages and halving the pay of new hires, the auto companies have been able to drastically increase the amount of what Marx called surplus value—the value created by workers above and beyond the cost of their wages. This is the basis of the vast profits—some \$11 billion for the Detroit automakers last year—that go directly into the pockets of the corporate CEOs and wealthy Wall Street investors.

The working class in the United States and around the world fought for more than a century to win the eight-hour day. To overcome the violent resistance of the industrialists and the government, workers had to shed much blood, including those of the four Haymarket martyrs sent to the gallows in Chicago in 1887 for leading the movement that demanded “eight hours for work, eight hours for rest and eight hours for what we will.”

Today the ruling classes in every country are seeking to turn the clock backwards and return workers to slave-like conditions. In response to these attacks, auto workers in India, Brazil, and France in recent months have engaged in battles against the global auto giants.

The collaboration of the UAW in the extension of the workday demonstrates the historic transformation of this organization. In 1937, the militant workers and socialist pioneers who led the Flint sit-down strike and established the UAW demanded a 30-hour week at 40 hours pay, with

time-and-a-half overtime payments after six hours of labor. Today, UAW executives like Bob King and General Holiefield demand that workers labor for longer hours and less pay in order to boost the profits of the auto bosses.

No amount of petitions or protests to the UAW—like the one called by the Labor Notes group at Warren Stamping—will make them change their minds about the AWS. With 40 percent of Chrysler's shares, the UAW apparatus has a direct financial incentive to increase, not lessen, the exploitation of workers.

This was made clear in the comments of Holiefield to the *Detroit News*. The "Flexible Operating Plan," the UAW bureaucrat said, has "proven to be successful, allowing the company to operate at maximum capacity..."

If there is to be a fight against these sweatshop conditions, then it has to be waged by the workers ourselves. Rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the pro-company UAW, should be organized to unite every section of workers throughout the auto industry to oppose the AWS and the two-tier system.

These committees will be the foundation for mobilizing the entire working class against the unending attack on all its social rights.

The WSWs spoke with Chrysler workers at the Warren Stamping plants, as well as Sterling Heights Assembly and North Jefferson about the new work schedule.

Pete, a veteran worker at Warren Stamping, said, "The AWS is just not right. Corporate greed is behind it. In my opinion it is all about taking away our overtime. Our fathers fought for things. They were paid for working overtime after eight hours. The company is making money, but we are making that money for them. Every contract we give and the company is taking.

"The sad truth is they are bringing in all the young people making half what we make. They are putting a big target on the back of the first tier workers. I fear they are going to eliminate the top tier at the next contract."

Referring to the role of the UAW, he said, "Bob King apparently thinks the UAW will do well with the IPO [Initial Public Offering] of stock that Chrysler is coming out with. What has that got to do with representing us? There was a picture inside the plant being sent around showing Marchionne and Holiefield shaking hands and hugging. It is pretty obvious they are planning to make everyone a lower tier worker."

A worker from the Sterling Heights plant said, "Most workers can't wait for the contract to expire in 2015

because they are going to stop paying union dues. The UAW does not represent us anymore. We're having our wages and benefits cut, our families destroyed with these new schedule. I'm going to have to work 5:30 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays—that takes away all the time when the family plans events."

Keith, a worker with 20 years at Jefferson North Assembly, said that Chrysler was implementing mandatory Sunday work. The plant has been under the Alternative Work Schedule since last fall. "They are now implementing Sundays because they say we are behind in production," he said. "Now they are going to be a seven-day-a-week operation, but we will get paid less because they did away with overtime until after 40 hours. They want us to work mandatory Sundays permanently. This Sunday will be 'B' crew and next Sunday will be 'C' crew. We've done it now for a month."

Clinton, a worker with 19 years at Jefferson, said, "It is mandatory to work on Sunday. It might be one day a month on each crew. The shift is different. It is hard to get adjusted to. I am working on 'C' crew, morning and days. It is pretty hard. I don't complain a lot, but the schedule is rough. It throws you off. You are exhausted."

Nichole, a young second tier worker at Warren Stamping, said, "I gave up a college scholarship to come to work here because I thought it was a good job. With the new schedule I won't be able to attend classes. The time and half on Saturdays was an incentive to give up part of your weekend, and now they have taken that away. They're stripping everything away and the UAW doesn't do anything for us. The union said this was a new thing and that it would be implemented right away, but they agreed to this back in 2007 or earlier."



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