

# Chrysler fires worker for protest

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The Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* condemn the firing by Chrysler Corporation of a worker involved in a February 28 protest outside the Warren Stamping plant in the Detroit suburbs. Alex Wassell, age 63, a welder who has worked for 20 years at Warren Stamping and is a supporter of the Labor Notes tendency, has been terminated following his indefinite suspension for engaging in activity “appearing to constitute a conflict of interest” with the company.

Wassell was one of the organizers of a rally against the new Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) being introduced at Chrysler and Ford plants. The victimization is aimed at intimidating opposition to the new work schedule, which is widely despised because of its imposition of extended shifts, the abolition of overtime after eight hours and on weekends and because of its disruptive effect on family life.

In firing Wassell Chrysler cited remarks made to the *Detroit News* in which the skilled tradesman noted issues with quality and low morale at the neighboring Warren Truck plant. A company spokesperson said that the remarks violated the company’s “code of conduct.” However, the *News*, which ran a story on the protest, denied that Wassell was the source of their report on quality issues.

Under the AWS normal eight-hour shifts are scrapped. Instead, crews work two 10-hour shifts per day, Monday through Saturday, without paid lunch breaks or overtime pay on the weekend. There are three rotating crews, each working four days on and three days off, for a total of 40 hours per week. One crew works split shifts, two days on days and two days on the night shift. The new schedule is highly profitable for the auto companies, which can operate their plants an extra 49 days per year without payment of overtime.

The firing of Wassell represents an act of intimidation and a fundamental attack on freedom of speech.

According to Chrysler management any statements by workers construed not to be in the interests of the company, on or off the job, can be the basis for dismissal.

As for the United Auto Workers, it is fully behind the implementation of the AWS, brushing aside protests and petitions by workers. Chrysler Chairman and CEO Sergio Marchionne praised the UAW’s role in helping implement the AWS stating, “Working with the UAW, we have come up with a creative solution to increase production.”

In a statement quoted in the *Detroit News* Wassell indicated that he expected the UAW to fight for his reinstatement. “I am still looking for an amicable settlement of the grievance between the union and the company,” he declared.

For its part, *Labor Notes* posted an article on the victimization on its web site which never mentioned the fact that the UAW supports the AWS. It concluded by urging workers to make phone calls to the UAW and Chrysler demanding Wassell’s reinstatement.

The idea that Wassell will get his job back through the efforts of the UAW, let alone through appeals to Chrysler management, is a pipedream. There is little doubt that the UAW supports the firing. A spokesperson for the international UAW told the WSWs that the union has not issued any statement on the dismissal. A WSWs reporter who called UAW Local 869, Wassell’s home local, about the firing was referred to UAW Region 1. The office of UAW Region 1 Director Charles Hall did not return our phone call.

A Sterling Stamping worker contacted by the WSWs said, “What he did was step on the UAW’s toes. The UAW is shunning him. They are not endorsing him. The UAW is only interested in dues. It is all about money. With partial control of the company, they are fighting for themselves.”

The firing of Wassell is an exposure of the program

of *Labor Notes*, which is based on pressuring and “reforming” the UAW. *Labor Notes* promotes the illusion that the UAW is in some way accountable to the rank-and-file, when in fact the UAW has completely integrated itself into the structure of management. Based on its right-wing program of “labor management partnership” and American nationalism the UAW seeks to undermine and sabotage every struggle of the working class in order to maintain the profitability of the auto companies.

The UAW supports the AWS, as well as the two-tier wage system, because it supports every measure by the auto companies to wring more profit out of the workforce. Indeed, the UAW, through its control of the VEBA (Voluntary Employee Beneficiary Association), owns a 41.5 percent stake in Chrysler, currently valued at \$3 billion-\$5 billion. It also holds billions in General Motors stock. It functions not as a workers’ organization but as a business, carefully managing its stock portfolio to secure the six figure incomes of the executives that control its apparatus. This is underscored by the fact that the income of the UAW has increased even as the membership of the union has plummeted.

The UAW does not have a “conflict of interest” with Chrysler. It only has a conflict of interest with workers who are in conflict with management. Inside the factories the UAW works as a police force for the auto companies, fingering militant workers who speak out in defense of their rights.

We call for the mobilization of auto workers to fight for the reinstatement of Wassell with full back pay. This struggle must be carried out independently of and against the UAW. Rank-and-file committees must be organized in every factory to fight the victimization as well as the two-tier wage system and AWS. Workers interested in helping to organize this fight should contact the WSWs .



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**