

Tensions high at Chrysler Warren Stamping in wake of victimization

Shannon Jones
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Tensions remain high at the Chrysler Warren Stamping plant north of Detroit in the wake of the victimization of skilled trades worker Alex Wassell over the implementation of the new Alternative Work Schedule (AWS). The 20-year Chrysler veteran, a supporter of the *Labor Notes* tendency, was fired earlier this month for his part in organizing a protest against the AWS.

The new work schedule, which recently went into effect at Warren Stamping and the adjacent Warren Truck assembly plant just north of Detroit, scraps the traditional eight-hour day in favor of 10-hour shifts, with no overtime payment after eight hours. There are three crews, (A, B and C), that work a staggered 40-hour-per-week work schedule, enabling the plant to operate six days a week without the payment of overtime.

The UAW, which supports the AWS, has done nothing to defend Wassell since the firing. Meanwhile, workers at Warren Stamping have independently organized a collection of funds inside the plant to support Wassell. A petition has also been circulated calling on the UAW to support his case. However, so great is the level of intimidation that many workers reportedly simply signed the petition with an X instead of using their name.

Warren Stamping workers interviewed by the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke about the reaction inside the plant to the firing of Wassell. A skilled trades worker said, “They have a *Detroit News* article about the case posted at the plant entrance. People are still unhappy about it. But, the local union is just denying any responsibility whatsoever.”

A young second-tier worker said many were angry with the union. “The UAW has not said anything. Nobody is happy. That is why the workers got together

and took up a collection for him. You didn’t see the union out there with a can collecting. That is something the people got together and did themselves.

“The union is not on our side. They are not doing anything to help him get his job back.

“As far as the Alternative Work Schedule, the UAW says there is nothing you can do.”

The initial implementation of the AWS at Warren Stamping has resulted in near chaos, with a reported drastic decrease in production. Warren Stamping workers described confusion and disorganization on the shop floor. A worker with 14 years who now works on B crew said, “It has a lot of bugs and kinks that should have been worked out. No one can really prepare for it. We are going day-by-day, week-by-week. Either they have too many people on a shift or not enough on a shift.”

The skilled trades worker said, “The first week they were behind by almost half, 7,000 pieces. I have talked with people, and they are just dealing with it. They feel they have lost any sort of ability to do anything about it. I think it really stinks for people with young families who have to rearrange their schedules.”

The young second-tier worker added, “It is disorganized. You have new people and even managers who don’t know what they are doing. They hired too many people in a short period of time. You would think they would be able to make their quota, but I have been working every Sunday since it started.

“They said this would be a way of getting more production. Instead everyone is getting more overtime. If they didn’t have this schedule in place we wouldn’t need this much overtime.

“A lot of people are upset because they can’t do anything with their kids. It is inconvenient for a lot of families. I am noticing a lot of people are not staying

over an extra two hours when they are asked. They asked B crew to come in Monday and Tuesday, which are supposed to be their days off.”

Since emerging from bankruptcy in 2009 Chrysler has hired some 8,000 new production workers at the lower, second-tier wage which is set at about one-half standard base pay and comes with fewer benefits. Large numbers of second-tier workers have been hired at both Warren Stamping and Warren Truck in preparation for the new work schedule. As a consequence Chrysler’s profits are booming, jumping 68 percent last year. With the imposition of the AWS at additional plants Chrysler hopes to boost this total even further.

The second-tier worker said that the union and management used the pay differential to pit the younger workers against the more senior. “I am hearing different stories, that in 2015 they are going to raise us and drop the wages of the top tier down. I don’t think I should do the same job and get paid half. Especially since they can get a lot more work out of me because I am young.”

She said the lower pay scale made it almost impossible to live. “I am a college student. I don’t have any children and stay with my mother in an apartment. I don’t think I could afford to live on my own with all the bills I have. I have been here more than a year, but the company doesn’t count the time I worked as a temporary toward my seniority.”

She also spoke about the impact of Michigan’s right-to-work law, which took effect March 28. The law, which is aimed at criminalizing collective resistance by the working class, bars contracts that require union membership as a condition of employment. The UAW has opposed it only because it makes dues payment voluntary.

“I am worried about what is going to happen when this right-to-work law takes effect. I have a feeling it is going to be a very bad year. But then, maybe we shouldn’t have to pay union dues if they are not going to help us when we need them.”



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