

Victimized Detroit Chrysler worker reinstated

Shannon Jones
25 April 2013

A victimized skilled trades worker at Chrysler's Warren Stamping plant just north of Detroit has been reinstated by management after more than one month off the job. Alex Wassell, a 20-year Chrysler veteran and a supporter of the Labor Notes tendency, returned to work last week following his dismissal for helping to organize a protest against the new alternative work schedule (AWS) at the plant.

Chrysler fired Wassell citing comments he made to the *Detroit News* about quality issues at the neighboring Warren Truck assembly plant. Management claimed that his statements represented a "conflict of interest" with the company.

The victimization was a blatant attempt by management to intimidate opposition to the AWS. It represented a crass violation of freedom of speech, with management asserting the right to police workers' thoughts both on and off the job.

The victimization of Wassell evoked enormous anger among Warren Stamping workers, who organized collections and petitions on his behalf. However, the UAW, which supports the AWS, refused to publicly defend Wassell. It took a month before UAW President Bob King finally spoke on the case during a taping of the PBS show "Autoline Detroit." The UAW only broke its silence because it felt that its role as an enforcer for management had been too openly exposed.

For its part Labor Notes refused to make a major issue of the firing, posting only one online article, which didn't even mention the role of the UAW in supporting the AWS. This is because the UAW's complicity in the firing exposed the bankruptcy of Labor Notes' perspective of reforming the pro-company unions.

Although Wassell has returned to work, a grievance over his dismissal is still pending. It is not clear if he will be awarded back pay and have his work record wiped clean. If not, Wassell may be subject to further

discipline or even termination in the event of any other supposed violations. No doubt the UAW would support this to prevent workers from expressing any "conflict of interest" with the company.

The AWS is widely hated for eliminating the 8-hour day and imposing 10-hour shifts and weekend work without the payment of overtime. Paid lunch breaks are eliminated and some workers are forced to work split shifts, rotating between days and evenings. Many must work Saturdays and even Sundays without payment of overtime.

Since the implementation of the AWS in March productivity has reportedly plummeted at Warren Stamping and the company has been scheduling additional overtime to make up the shortfall.

A Warren Stamping skilled trades worker told the WSW, "I spoke with the union and they told me that he (Wassell) was coming back. It took way too long in my opinion. It was only because the union felt pressured. Bob King mentioned it in an interview, but that was after one month."

He said workers were glad to see Wassell reinstated. "I am sure everyone will stand behind him."

Commenting on the AWS he said, "I wonder if they are going to wait or come out and admit that production isn't better. They are behind where they were before they started this. The people I have spoken with say it is tough and they hope it doesn't last."

He was also angry about the role of the UAW in implementing and expanding the two-tier wage, setting pay for new hires at one-half standard base wages. "They are bringing in a whole new generation of people that don't know the history. It is a sad thing.

"The two-tier wage was one of the biggest downfalls the union made outside of the new work schedule. The UAW seems to be in it for the money, just like the company."

Another skilled trades worker said, "The two-tier

wage should never have been implemented in the first place and this last contract the union gave the company an open door to hire as many two-tier people as they want.

“I think the AWS is terrible. Just for the sake of having us work on the weekends they take a weekend day and make it normal. Now everyone is working Saturday and Sunday regularly. People are working more than they ever have, non-stop. The ‘A’ shift is the only shift they give you time-and-a-half and double time on the weekend. I am concerned about all the young people with families who have to work Saturday and Sunday. What they are doing is really against the law, but no one is challenging it.

(UAW Vice President) Holiefield was told emphatically by the whole staff, skilled trades and production workers, not to approve the AWS. What did he say to the workers? ‘If you don’t want to do it somebody else is going to do it.’

“The union doesn’t care about their workers. We once upon a time had a union. We no longer have one. We have no rights whatsoever. What good is the UAW in the plant?”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact