

The UAW-company productivity plan: A recipe for speedup and injuries

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On page two of the official contract highlights provided by the United Auto Workers to mislead workers, the UAW boasts that among its “gains” are bonuses that are “tied to quality metrics, WCM, skilled trades metrics, and productivity audit scores.”

Workers are saying that these so-called gains are actually major pitfalls in the sellout deal put forward by the UAW and Fiat Chrysler.

By tying workers’ wages to productivity, the UAW and the company are ensuring that the next four years will involve an intensification of speed-ups. In other words, the structure of work is being transformed back into a type of piecework system—the very type of work workers organized against in the early decades of the 20th century.

Workers across the country, from Kansas City to Louisville and Ohio, are reporting that the auto companies are already speeding up production. At Kansas City Assembly, pre-production workers are being forced to work 12-hour shifts, 7 days a week. The UAW raises no opposition to this, despite the fact that the companies are obviously stockpiling vehicles in case the workers go on strike.

One Chrysler Toledo worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “We just hit record numbers on Cherokee at 576 [a day]. How can the line be set at the right speed and we’re making so many? It’s sped up. The UAW says it’s not, but of course they’re going to say that. They want us to stay an hour over, they want us to come earlier—they took away our family day because of an audit they scheduled. They cancelled it indefinitely.”

What would it look like if workers were forced to work harder than they already are?

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several autoworkers at the Ford Assembly Plant in Louisville, Kentucky about conditions in their plant. Conditions

here are the rule—not the exception.

One worker at Louisville said, “We face extremely long shifts. You get home after 11 hours, and you can’t do anything else.”

It is common for the companies and the unions to force autoworkers to work “swing shifts,” where workers are forced to work a day shift one day and a night shift the next.

“When you have a swing shift your body is facing it and it messes up your sleeping pattern to the point where you never feel quite right. When I’m on a swing shift, I feel like the character ‘Neo’ from the film ‘The Matrix.’”

“You’re going to have an injury in there with these speed-ups. The difference in the number of cars we produce is huge. And the overtime—the overtime we do at the plant is the hardest you’ll ever do in life. When you get home it’s like you’re half-drunk driving home because you’re so tired.”

A second Louisville worker said, “After eight hours of work, your body is really screwed. We work 10 hours—whatever they want. Today we worked ten and a half hours and made 740 trucks. It’s slavery.”

“Safety is out the window when something breaks down. It’s been like that for 20 years. The line is running like crazy, and they’ll use tape to fix parts. So many people are getting injured because they’re all busted up. We have shoulders, elbows, tendinitis...It’s like they’re getting hit by a truck, that’s how it feels. I’m beat to hell 20 years of this.”

“It sucks when your daughter wants to go outside and play. My day starts at 4:30 in the morning and I don’t get home until 6:30 at night. Then you have to try to cook and eat and have some family activities, and clean up. It’s hard because my wife works, too.”

A third Louisville worker said, “It’s basically a

hostile work environment. Last week at our body shop there was some harassment going on where an autoworker questioned something and the company was threatening to take people up for drug tests in retribution. No one can get a union rep over there—it took them days to even get a union rep out there. And supervisors are asking people if they are going to cross the picket line if there is a strike. That is really out of line.”

A fourth Louisville worker moved from Detroit after plant closures there. He is one of thousands of “UAW Gypsies” who have been forced to move their lives from homes in the North in order to pay the bills.

“Workers here can’t even afford to buy a vehicle they make for \$19 an hour. Even with us tier-one employees, I haven’t had a raise in ten years and it’s hard to raise a family. If you have kids in college, daycare, medical—it’s difficult. You cannot raise a family.

“The UAW won’t shut down the line if it’s sped up, the line will run no matter what. They are constantly increasing line speeds, changing everything, saying we have to make more, more, more. People can’t do it. Forty-year-olds, fifty-year-olds can’t go at that speed.

“Two weeks ago it was 99 degrees and they’ll call an early break at 7:15 when they run out of parts, which means we have to go for four hours without a break later. Someone had a seizure out there recently.

“And there are a lot of injuries. Hand injuries, carpal tunnel, neck, back injuries. You have to be almost dead for them to shut down the line—the union will never stop the line for you. They’ll drag you off to the side so someone can come get you but they won’t stop the line.”

There are thousands of transfer employees in Louisville. These modern-day dust bowl migrants are forced to move their entire families just for the opportunity to make a meager wage working for the Big Three companies. “You have to pick up everything and go. Unless you want to commute, the average person packs up kids, moves them out of school and goes down here. It’s rough on a lot of them. All their families are back where they came from. It’s rough. They say otherwise you won’t have a job.

“But if you didn’t take the offer the first or second time you didn’t have a job anymore. People are forced to come down here and they lost money. People had

houses they had to put up and they lost money on that. It’s rough. Their children in elementary school, packing everything up and starting anew. It’s not fair. Once you come down here you’re stuck. You don’t have the right to go back—they’re not going to allow that.”



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