

Anger as UAW rams through 12-hour, 7-day schedule for FCA Sterling Heights Assembly skilled trades workers

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The Sterling Heights Assembly Rank-and-File Safety Committee has released a statement demanding the immediate rescinding of the new work schedule for skilled trades. Read the statement here.

Over the strong objection of workers, the United Auto Workers and Fiat Chrysler have agreed to impose a grueling 12-hour, 7-day work schedule for skilled tradesmen at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) north of Detroit. The factory builds the highly profitable Dodge Ram light truck.

The new pattern is based on the Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) provisions implemented under the terms of the national UAW-FCA contract. It involves four rotating crews who each work seven 12-hour days in a row, then are off for seven days over the course a two-week period. The workers are compensated at straight time, with no overtime pay awarded for work after eight hours.

Skilled trades workers are threatening a rebellion over the changes, which endanger workers' health and safety by imposing an impossibly intense work schedule. Almost 300 SHAP skilled trades signed a petition, delivered to the International UAW and FCA Vice President for Fiat Chrysler Cindy Estrada, opposing the changes and threatening to stop paying union dues if the change is implemented.

Under the plan, in the first week, "A" Crew would work from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and "B" Crew would work the night shift from 7 p.m. – 7 a.m. The second week, "A" Crew and "B" Crew would not work, and "C" Crew and "D" Crew would work the same 12-hour day-night schedule.

According to terms of the 2019 UAW-FCA national agreement, management can implement AWS, which

permits shifts of as long as 12 hours at straight time, with the agreement of the local UAW leadership. No ratification vote by the membership is required.

A similar 12-hour schedule under provisions of the AWS provisions is in place at Ford Dearborn Truck, with the difference that workers are paid a premium after eight hours.

Production workers at SHAP are already under an AWS schedule, involving three crews who work staggered 10-hour shifts at straight time. The schedule allows management to squeeze out extra production without payment of overtime.

A SHAP skilled trades worker, Frank (whose name has been changed to protect his identity), told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* "[the Dearborn Truck] workers have other perks in the contract, time and a quarter. We don't have that. The premiums are x-ed out.

"We run at half manpower on the weekend on skilled trades, but they haven't replaced retirees or people who quit. We run 51 tradesmen short; that translates to 102 people short on the weekend."

"It is taking us back more than 80 years," another skilled trades worker told the *Autoworker Newsletter*. "I am not a labor historian, but I know that unions fought for an eight-hour workday—and a five-day workweek. Now, what the UAW has done has willfully made this concession—and what they will say is 'we voted it in.'

"It is true that we voted in the AWS, but the truth is, we were never given all of the information. It's in the contract, but you would need a magnifying glass to see it in the fine print. Nobody understood what AWS was. What [the UAW] would say was, 'We don't have all

the information.’ The real question is, why would the UAW allow it to even get in the contract?

“There are so many unanswered questions. For example, you get PPA days—paid absences—those are doled out in 40-hour segments. You get one week off in eight-hour increments. If I want to take a day off, do I have to use eight hours plus another four hours?

“So now we are overworked. Yeah, we get a week off, but what if I can’t make it to the week off? If I am so worn out I can’t even get to my car? What good does that do? If I am so worn out I spend the whole week recuperating, or I can’t recuperate.

The worker explained that the new schedule would put an impossible strain on workers. “It is a health and safety issue because of fatigue. That was what was happening in the other location. People were coming to work, they were so tired. So why are we going to the same plan, when we know what it will do to people’s lives?”

He noted that management was not claiming the new schedule was needed due to production issues. “We have the best record in terms of production and vehicle output. The truck is selling. They couldn’t say they are hurting. [The UAW] just came to us and said, ‘This is what management wants, and the bottom line is it’s in the contact.’” He added, “Hey, you put it there.”

By imposing the AWS at SHAP, the UAW is setting a precedent that can be used to impose similar 12-hour schedules at other FCA plants.

Frank added, “It’s alarming what’s going on. Everybody knows it’s crooked. The level of divide against the UAW is really unique in the plant. We are getting hit so hard.

“Our local union meetings are held on the company auditorium on site. That’s mind-blowing to me. It’s bizarre, like planning a battle in the camp of the enemy. How are these contracts legally binding? Up to 15 senior [UAW] members have been indicted or are serving prison sentences.

“There are 286 tradesman including myself that said that we will stop paying union dues. We signed it and printed it and it was supposed to be presented to the international by the union local leadership. I think that sends a message.”

The worker reported that a meeting that had been requested with UAW Vice President for FCA Cindy Estrada had not happened after Estrada “bailed.”

Remarking on the corruption exposed in the UAW leadership, including former UAW Presidents Gary Jones and Dennis Williams, Frank added, the UAW “embezzled millions and have spent millions on all of these peoples’ defenses, but that’s my money and my coworkers’ money. Would you pay for a thief’s legal defense?”

Both workers reported that the UAW was collaborating with management to cover up COVID-19 cases in the plant. Frank reported that at least six skilled tradesmen he knew of had been sent home for COVID-19 or COVID-19-like symptoms. “We are finding out from coworkers calling us. Human Resources’ response is so minimal.”

The first worker added, “They aren’t telling us anything. A couple of weeks ago there were rumors about infections that weren’t reported to the membership. The [UAW] steward’s answer was that they were at another center. But we all punch in and out at the same turnstile. There was no excuse for not telling us.”

The *Autoworker Newsletter* calls on SHAP skilled trades workers to support the fight being waged by the Sterling Heights Assembly Rank-and-File Safety Committee.

Members of the Sterling Heights Assembly Rank-and-File Safety Committee support the fight by the skilled trade workers. Said one founding member: “We stand with skilled trades against these anti-worker actions by the UAW that create an inhuman work schedule. We call for the abolition of the AWS and all the anti-worker contract language imposed by the corrupt UAW.”

To join the rank-and-file safety committee at SHAP, or for help forming your own committee at your workplace, contact the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* today at autoworkers@wsws.org.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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