

Restore the eight-hour day! Stop the move to twelve-hour shifts for skilled trades workers at Michigan FCA plant!

The Sterling Heights Assembly Plant Rank-and-File Safety Committee
11 October 2020

The Sterling Heights Rank-and-File Safety Committee opposes the implementation of 12-hour shifts and seven-day workweeks for skilled trades workers in the plant. We call on workers at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) and other factories to fight the conspiracy of the United Auto Workers and Fiat Chrysler and to demand the immediate rescinding of the plans to bring back industrial slavery.

This is an issue that affects us all, not just skilled trades. All over the country, and even the world, the eight-hour day is under attack. Our parts worker brothers and sisters at Faurecia Gladstone in Indiana are forced to work 12-hour days, seven days a week without even the week off in between like the schedule being proposed for skilled trades at Sterling Heights. In Canada, only a few short miles away from our plant, the Unifor union is forcing through the hated Alternative Work Schedule (AWS) on our Canadian brothers and sisters through lies. They simply did not tell anyone the new contract included AWS until after workers voted on the contract.

For years now, workers at SHAP and other Fiat Chrysler plants have been forced to work 10-hour days. During the pandemic, workers are also being forced to work extra shifts over the weekend. Many are temporary part-time (TPT) workers without even basic contractual rights, making wages right on the poverty line. However, full-time workers work 10 hours at straight time on meager wages, with no overtime pay other than mandatory Sundays and back-filled shifts.

The eight-hour day was one of the most cherished historical accomplishments of the labor movement. For generations, our forefathers fought and died for this right. Now even skilled trades are being forced to work

schedules which are straight out of the 1800s. We can't afford to let this pass without a fight!

Working 84 hours a week creates dangerous working conditions. A tired electrician can make a deadly mistake—which management would blame on them. Exhausted workers are less alert on the road driving home at night. The strain of such a brutal work schedule creates the danger of injury, even with seven days off in between.

But the eight-hour day is not only for our own health and safety and to allow us to recover physically. It is also necessary so that we can live like human beings. We all have lives outside of the plant, which we will not abandon.

It is nearly a decade since the UAW first began to "bargain" away this right at Chrysler. This was done by criminals like General Holifield, Norwood Jewell and others who were bribed by FCA management. The one overseeing the 12-hour day scheme is Cindy Estrada, who came from the UAW GM Human Resource Center, a cesspool of corruption.

The UAW did not even allow the skilled tradesmen the formality of a vote on the 12-hour day, which it would then ignore as it always does. Instead, the union allowed them only to vote on which grueling work schedule was "best."

At this point, after more than a dozen union officials, including two past presidents, Dennis Williams and Gary Jones, have pleaded guilty to stealing union dues and accepting corporate bribes, hardly a single autoworker can be surprised by this. But what is needed is not only to recognize this fact, but to act on it.

When we act independently of the union, we are more powerful than the union bureaucrats or management. In

March, when the auto companies and the UAW conspired to keep us on the job as the pandemic raged out of control, we SHAP workers drew a line in the sand and refused to work in unsafe conditions. Wildcat actions spread outward from SHAP to other plants, including the Jefferson North, Warren Truck and Toledo Jeep Complex, and within a single day, the companies were forced to back down, at least temporarily, and close plants all over the country.

We must take matters into our own hands again and organize ourselves. The first step is to agree on a series of common demands. We propose the following:

1. The immediate end of the "12/7" shift. Return both skilled trades and production workers to eight hours per day, five days per week work schedules. Overtime must be strictly voluntary, and all work performed after 8 hours each day and/or 40 hours a week must be paid at time and a half.

2. Management must immediately fill all vacancies in skilled trades to end their overwork. The new hires should come, in the first place, from among qualified production workers.

3. Eliminate all tiers! All TPTs must be immediately hired in as full-time workers, with seniority accrued from their time as TPTs. To begin with, TPTs must be hired in to fill the spots left by other production workers hired on as skilled tradesmen.

The fight to defend the eight-hour day can't be separated from the fight against unsafe conditions in the pandemic. They are two sides of the same coin. Therefore, we also raise the following demands:

1. All workers must be immediately notified of any cases of COVID-19 and all areas and shifts that are affected. This information cannot be kept secret from workers.

2. The companies must make available to workers a total count of positive and potential COVID-19 cases, updated in real time.

3. Workers must have regular, universal testing. Temperature checks and self-reporting symptoms are just so much PR.

4. We will not be targeted, written up, terminated or harassed in any way for taking time off to get tested and get results, or for raising concerns about safety.

5. When there's a case confirmed, the factory should be closed for at least 48 hours for deep cleaning, not just the affected area, but the whole plant.

6. Social distancing must be implemented at all times—at workstations, when entering and leaving the plant and during bathroom, lunch and other break times. If social distancing is impossible at some workstations, they should either be redesigned, or the plant should be closed, with full compensation for all workers.

7. Whenever conditions are not safe, we have the right to collectively refuse to work without any threat of retaliation by management or the union.

We are fighting to build rank-and-file safety committees as new organizations of struggle at plants throughout the country. We already are part of such a network, which includes committees at other FCA plants, at Ford and parts plants, and also committees founded by teachers in Detroit, New York City and other major school districts opposed to the unsafe re-opening of classes.

If you agree with these demands, join us. Contact us by writing to autoworkers@wsws.org. To discuss these demands and a strategy to fight back, outside of the view of company and union spies, join the rank-and-file committees' Facebook page. And for more news about the real situation facing workers, subscribe to the World Socialist Web Site *Autoworker Newsletter*.



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