

“The company and the UAW are only concerned with profits”

Stellantis revives 12-hour shifts for Sterling Heights Assembly skilled trades

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21 January 2021

Management and the United Auto Workers at Stellantis’ Sterling Heights Assembly Plant north of Detroit are reviving plans for a 12-hour 7-day work schedule for skilled trades, autoworkers learned late last week. Stellantis is the successor company to Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, which was formed out of its merger with French automaker PSA earlier this month.

In late December, the *Detroit Free Press* reported that the brutal work schedule had been withdrawn due to overwhelming opposition. This was expressed through a campaign against the schedule by the SHAP Rank-and-File Safety Committee, formed last summer in opposition to unsafe working conditions, as well as the circulation of a petition calling for the withholding of union dues.

The United Auto Workers had backed the plan, which it said was allowable under terms of the 2019 national contact agreement relating to alternative work schedules. In remarks to the *Detroit Free Press* last month Cindy Estrada, UAW vice president for the then-FCA, repeated the standard mantra about the need to “preserve jobs.”

The proposed schedule has provoked enormous outrage among workers, who see it as a fundamental attack on the eight-hour day and the gains won by generations of autoworkers. Under one proposal being presented to skilled trades workers they would have to work seven days in a row, 12 hours a day, followed by seven days off. Workers pointed to the impossible demands that such a schedule would put on workers’ bodies, not to mention family life.

Now it is apparent that the earlier report by the *Free Press* that the 12/7 schedule had been withdrawn was deliberately misleading, aimed at buying the UAW and

management a little more time to prepare a new blitz to impose the grueling 12-hour schedule.

The alternative work schedule (AWS) was first introduced in 2009 as part of the concessions demanded by the Obama administration during the bankruptcy and forced restructuring of Chrysler and General Motors. It permitted “nontraditional” work schedules extending the workday beyond the normal eight hours, without payment of overtime. By agreeing to this setup, the UAW in effect abandoned the eight-hour day, a central demand fought for by workers since the late 19th century.

A provision buried in the 2019 contract allowed Fiat Chrysler to force skilled trades workers to work AWS at “high volume” plants. According to a memo by Glenn Shagena, FCA vice president and head of employee relations, the schedule would “maximize the utilization of our facilities and ensure we have the flexibility to respond quickly to market fluctuations. Alternative work schedules allow the company to increase competitiveness, provide greater job security for our employees, improve work-life balance and efficiently utilize assets.” In other words, anything goes that boosts company profits.

The attack on skilled trades workers comes as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads unchecked. Token safety measures have been largely abandoned while new cases of COVID-19 are being covered up by the UAW and management. The plant faces manpower shortages due to workers taking sick time or early retirements to avoid being exposed to the virus.

According to a memo sent by Keith Linton, UAW Local 1700 skilled trades committeeman, a vote will be held January 22 on the various proposed AWS

schedules, all of which include 12-hour shifts. The vote follows informational meetings held this week on short notice.

According to the memo it appears workers are being given the choice between two grueling schedules. The first is the originally proposed schedule, with seven 12-hour days on and 7 days off. The second calls for two 12-hour days, followed by 2 days off, then three 12s followed by 2 days off, and then two 12s and three days off. The shifts will be split among four rotating crews.

As reports of the revival of the 12-hour work schedule spread to other plants it is evoking anger from both production and skilled trade workers. A line worker at the Toledo North Assembly Plant that builds FCA/Stellantis Jeep vehicles told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*: “At the end of the day the company is going to get production out by all means. It is honestly all sickening to me and sad; but if we want to provide for our families, life must go on. It sounds like maybe skilled trades need to take a stand.”

A SHAP skilled trades worker told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “International reps did not show up for the meetings.” He noted that instead, “Management was in the meeting answering questions about how this schedule will work. Many questions still remain unanswered, but the vote is Friday as of now with only two options to choose from. Start times are 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., period. [UAW Vice President] Cindy Estrada was not there nor the skilled trades reps.”

The worker said, “In this time of a global pandemic FCA and the UAW are only concerned with profits. FCA has made record profits as workers have risked their lives to produce vehicles under the threat of losing their livelihood. Yet that in itself is not enough. More, more and more is needed from the worker to feed the corporate machine. 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, is against federal labor laws, but the UAW negotiated these schedules supposedly on our behalf.

“The UAW no longer stands with the autoworker. They no longer stand for workers’ rights. The UAW is complicit in the destruction of the middle class, the loss of workers’ rights, and the death of countless workers who could not afford to lose their jobs in this pandemic. And if that isn’t enough, they say, ‘We need you to work 12 hours, 7 days a week.’”

The worker noted that management was saying that

SHAP would be the first plant with the 12-hour schedule, making it a test case for the spread of the brutal work schedule to other facilities. But, far from opposing the plan, the UAW has embraced it.

“We should *all* be trying to make this go away,” he said.

“FCA made record profits and are in a new ‘merger.’ This is the perfect time to stand up and say *no*.”

He added, referring to the present situation, “It seems we are reliving the American Revolution, the 1918 Pandemic, the Great Depression and the Civil Rights movement all at once.”



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