

UAW and Stellantis set April 5 start date for 12-hour, seven-day schedule for skilled trades at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant

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18 February 2021

After initially hesitating in the face of mass worker opposition, the United Auto Workers and Stellantis (formerly Fiat Chrysler) are now forging ahead with plans to implement a brutal 12-hour, seven-day work rotation for skilled trades at the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) in the north Detroit suburbs.

A start date has been set for April 5 for the 12/7 schedule, which will involve four rotating crews alternating over a two-week period. The UAW has given its full support to this attack on the eight-hour day, claiming the 12-hour schedule is allowed under provisions of the sellout 2019 contact agreement relating to alternative work schedules.

As first reported by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* last October, when management and the UAW floated the idea of the 12/7 schedule at SHAP, it evoked enormous opposition. An article published by the WSWs on the grueling work schedule was read tens of thousands of times.

In response to the schedule, the SHAP Rank-and-File Safety Committee—formed by workers last year independently of the UAW to fight for protection against COVID-19—issued a statement denouncing the plan, calling for production workers and skilled trades at SHAP and other plants to unite in a struggle against the company’s attacks. In addition, hundreds of SHAP skilled trades workers signed a petition addressed to UAW Vice President Cindy Estrada threatening to withdraw from paying union dues.

Later, as reported by the *Detroit Free Press*, management decided to put the 12/7 schedule on hold. However, last month the UAW and management indicated that it would be implemented in the spring.

The expansion of the alternative work schedule

(AWS), which had been implemented for production workers at SHAP until the beginning of this year, into the skilled trades represents a further major assault on the eight-hour day and the destruction of gains won in over a century of bitter class struggle. Not only has the UAW agreed to implement an intolerable 12-hour on, 12-hour off work pattern, but the principle of overtime after eight hours is abolished. In addition, management will allow workers to stay on the job up to 16 hours if needed, or longer if there is an “emergency.”

Ford previously implemented 12-hour shifts for skilled trades at the Dearborn Truck Plant, but has maintained overtime payments for work past eight hours.

Management at SHAP is additionally implementing the “team production” concept for skilled trades, breaking down traditional work rules and demarcations within trades. According to a memo published by UAW Local 1700, “During these discussions Management asserted its intent to expand the team concept from Production into Skilled Trades simultaneously while implementing the 4-Crew AWS pattern.”

According to the UAW-management memo, signed by Local 1700 President Louie Pahl and Skilled Trades Committeeman Keith Linton, “The team concept permits the skilled trades teams to be cross functionally trained within their respective team; ensuring that each employee can support their fellow team members and to cover one another when absences arise. Ensuring that each employee is properly trained is critical to the success of individuals as well as the success of the plant.”

The only vote allowed by the UAW on the 12/7 schedule was over which rotation workers preferred

and the shift start time and end time. Workers voted for a seven-day on and seven-day off rotation, with shifts starting and ending at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Even this abysmal “choice” is subject to management discretion.

While the new schedule is purportedly being advanced to relieve manpower shortages, particularly on the weekend, and to reduce the need for contractors, the 12/7 shifts are clearly the thin edge of the wedge aimed at destroying any work rules that limit exploitation. At no point has the UAW expressed opposition to the drastic changes, instead serving mainly as a messenger boy for management and offering suggestions on how to smooth the implementation of the new schedule.

The plan for 12/7 shifts is fueling already widespread hostility to the UAW, which is despised by workers for its cover-up with management of the extent of COVID-19 transmission in the plant. Since the start of the pandemic, hundreds have been infected, resulting in the death of at least one SHAP worker and another six deaths at the nearby Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant.

A SHAP skilled trades worker told the *Autoworker Newsletter*, “It doesn’t make sense to be building \$60-80,000 vehicles during a pandemic and making record profits. How are they even doing that? To get through a pandemic and not miss a beat? The companies are being propped up by the government, and the upper echelons are profiting.”

Speaking on the implementation of the 12/7 schedule, he said, “The worker doesn’t stand a chance. Some guys are reacting in an individualist way, saying they will go to Ford.

“I say, ‘Do you run away and not stand up to the situation? What are you going to do about it when the same thing comes to Ford?’

“Guys have already retired or transferred. In my opinion they may have a plan to push people out and have in place a structure where jobs have been combined and positions have been lost, then at some point they can go right back to the traditional system if the 7/12 doesn’t work.”

He said he didn’t anticipate management would hire new workers to replace the attrition. “It means to operate, everyone in skilled trades will have to buy gym shoes and roller skates. Running from here to there, covering a large area and working 12 hours.”

He said management was in particular targeting high seniority workers. “Legacy workers still have pensions. Those are the ones they would like to see gone.”

The *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter* calls on SHAP workers and all autoworkers to join or build rank-and-file safety committees at your plant to oppose the UAW-management gang-up and fight for workers’ health and safety.

Another SHAP skilled trades worker said, “The 12-hour day, why would you even allow that to be in the negotiations, especially with no overtime?”

He denounced the statements by Cindy Estrada, head of the UAW Stellantis department, who made statements during negotiations claiming that alternative work schedules provided job security and could “improve work-life balance.”

“It should be clear to anyone that was garbage,” he said. “If there was any concern for work-life balance, how has that changed now? Contractors are here more often than not because of mismanagement by upper management. It is not about protecting jobs.

“The UAW has demonstrated it is anti-worker. There is a petition going around to recall the skilled trades committeeman. In my opinion it is too little too late. He is a small fish in a big pond. He never offered any pushback, just, ‘This is what they are telling me.’

“We need to join with other skilled trades workers in the area, Warren Truck, Jefferson North, Trenton Engine,” he said, adding that autoworkers needed to follow the example of teachers, who have organized strikes and protests against school reopenings.



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