Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant skilled tradesmen continue protests over 12-hour, 7-day schedule

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Skilled trades workers at Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) outside of Detroit are circulating a fact sheet citing multiple violations by the United Auto Workers of local and national agreements as part of the union's collusion with management to impose a mandatory rotating 12-hour, 7-day work schedule.

Hundreds of tradesmen at the plant will be forced onto the killing work regimen starting April 5 under terms of a deal cobbled together between UAW officials and management. The schedule involves four shifts alternating over a two-week rotation.

Imposed under terms of a side agreement buried in the 2019 contact relating to alternative work schedules (AWS), the 12/7 schedule eliminates time and one-half overtime pay after 8 hours on Saturday, saving management millions in wages. Meanwhile, workers will see their health undermined and family life disrupted by an irregular and stressful schedule.

The imposition of a 12-hour schedule, in flagrant violation of standards fought for by workers over the past 150 years or more, is the latest egregious betrayal by the UAW. Over the past year the UAW has collaborated with management to enforce a return to a full production schedule in the midst of a deadly pandemic that has sickened hundreds and killed an unknown number of autoworkers, including SHAP worker Mark Bianchi last fall.

The fact sheet being circulated by workers in opposition to the 12/7 schedule begins by citing Article 2, section 1 (Objects) of the UAW Constitution which states the union's purpose is, "To improve working conditions, create a uniform system of shorter hours, higher wages, health care and pensions; to maintain and protect the interests of workers under the jurisdiction of this International Union."

It goes on to demonstrate that in multiple cases the AWS at SHAP violates the stated purpose of the UAW by destroying existing rights and conditions, noting, for example that AWS violates terms of the 2019 contact by imposing a 12-hour, 7-day schedule, establishing a standard work week of more than 40 hours, eliminating time and one-half on Saturday, and an overall reduction in take home pay. It also points out that paid absence and vacation days are subtracted at 12 hours, rather then the usual eight hours, robbing workers of time off.

The fact sheet further notes that in violation of the UAW Constitution, the AWS violates provisions of the local contract, which under Article 19 of the UAW Constitution can only be waived through a vote by the membership. The Constitution also explicitly stipulates that the International Union will protect all local unions that have in place higher wages and more favorable conditions than mandated by the national agreement.

In a separate flyer, workers are being urged to "speak out" by contacting Wilma Liebman, the international ethics officer appointed by the UAW. Liebman served as chairman of the National Labor Relations Board under the Obama administration and served as a NLRB board member under Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

A SHAP skilled trades worker, speaking to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* under condition of anonymity, explained that "A group of workers printed this (fact sheet) and gave it to everyone advising workers to call the UAW ethics office and tell them the AWS is a clear violation of our local contract section 1 section 3 and section 6.

"People have already started calling her, (Liebman) but where is it going to go? I don't think it will change the situation. All they do is take your name and the complaint and say they will forward it to the UAW. They don't tell

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you anything.

"All the local UAW says is that without the support of the International they cannot do anything about it (12/7 schedule), management is going to go ahead with this."

"I am not sure why [management] is doing this. They are short already. If they add a fourth shift they are going to make it worse. There will be a lot of problems.

"I think they will find they are short of people, and they will say, 'well you guys manage with fewer people.' They are not going to hire additional people, they will just depend on the workers they have. It is hard to get tradesmen, and it will be especially hard with the AWS."

He added, "Some people like to work overtime, but don't force them by saying you have to work 12 hours no matter what, even when we are not getting paid overtime on Saturday."

Liebman was installed by Acting UAW President Rory Gamble in March 2020 as the federal investigation continued to nab top UAW officials, including two former presidents, who were revealed to have been pocketing millions in kickbacks and auto company bribe money.

A former union attorney, Liebman has deep ties to the corrupt trade union bureaucracy and big business Democratic Party. Over the years the NLRB, as well as federal courts, have consistently ruled that workers who are victimized by their own union have no legal standing to sue, invariably remanding complaints over union abuses back for resolution by the same union that betrayed the workers.

The degree to which the UAW has been converted into little more than a subsidiary of auto company management was demonstrated by the agreement by Fiat Chrysler/Stellantis to plead guilty to funneling $3.5 million in bribes to UAW officials to obtain contact concessions. The federal government ordered FCA/Stellantis to pay a mere $30 million fine, a profitable investment given that contract concessions handed over by the UAW have saved wealthy stockholders and hedge funds hundreds of millions of dollars since 2009. The real victims in this heist, the workers, have not been awarded a penny in compensation during the entire course of the corruption investigation.

The appointment of an ethics officer over the UAW, by the very corrupt Solidarity House officers who oversaw the massive bribe-taking and other sordid activities in the first place, of course will not change anything. The fact that the UAW ethics officer is paid by the same staff says it all.

Further, the imposition of a 12-hour work schedule in violation of the principle of the 8-hour day is not due primarily to individual corruption, but far deeper processes that have seen the unions in the US and globally transformed over the last 40 or more years into tools of management to discipline the workers. Based on their pro-capitalist and nationalist program the unions have abandoned any defense of workers interests in favor of unlimited collaboration with management to lower wages and destroy working conditions in the name of global "competitiveness."

The growing opposition to the 12/7 schedule is part of a simmering rebellion by workers to the homicidal policies of the government and corporations, which have insisted on keeping factories open during an uncontained pandemic to fuel profits for Wall Street. At every step the unions have sided with the corporations to keep production running in the face of infection and death.

It is one year since workers at SHAP and other Detroit area auto plants stopped production and forced a temporary shutdown of auto production as the pandemic exploded across the US, Canada and Mexico. What is needed is for workers to draw the conscious lessons of that experience. We call on SHAP workers to join the rank-and-file safety committee at the plant, organized independently of the corrupt UAW, to carry forward the struggle against the 12/7 schedule and the spread of the pandemic. This struggle requires that workers at SHAP reach out to their brother and sister autoworkers at other Detroit area plants as well as other sections of workers battling deadly conditions such as educators and Amazon workers.

Contact the WSWS *Autoworker Newsletter* today for more information about how to become involved.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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