

Atmosphere tense as 12-hour/seven-day schedule goes into effect at Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly

Shannon Jones
5 April 2021

In the face of overwhelming opposition, the 12-hour/seven-day work rotation for skilled trades at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) in the Detroit area has gone into effect. The draconian schedule establishes four rotating crews working seven days on and seven days off without overtime, after eight hours under terms of the alternative work schedule (AWS) negotiated by the UAW in the 2019 national auto contract.

While the 12-hour day will create enormous stress and disruption in the lives of workers, one immediate impact will likely be an exodus of skilled trades workers from SHAP through retirement or moves to other employers, forcing an even greater workload onto the already overstretched maintenance staff.

This is the first time that an AWS has been implemented in skilled trades, making it a test case for plants throughout the country. It shreds what is left of the principle of the eight-hour day, turning back the clock more than a century to a period where workers had no time for personal or family life.

At no point since the 12/7 schedule was first floated last fall has the UAW voiced any opposition, insisting that the contract language they slipped into the 2019 agreement permits the schedule change. The change in work schedule is doubly onerous under conditions where reports indicate that COVID-19 is once again rapidly spreading through the auto plants.

Concurrent with the imposition of the 12/7 schedule, management is implementing the so-called "team concept," where workers can be forced to perform multiple jobs. This is a recipe for overstress and accidents and is particularly dangerous during the pandemic under conditions where skilled trades

workers may have to service multiple production lines.

A SHAP skilled trades worker told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*, "This is crazy. They are going through with it. We haven't gotten anything from the union except when it is going to start.

"Reality is starting to sink in for supervisors. They don't even get any overtime on Sunday. Supervisors now have to work 84 hours, and they only get eight hours overtime. A management guy told me, 'I am not working seven days, 12 hours a day for nothing.'

"For us on the AWS there is no Saturday overtime unless you are working on your off week.

"In 2009 they said the economy was bad, and they needed to restructure. Then soon thereafter they came up with the theory that people were taking advantage of the overtime system. If you worked on a Saturday, you would get time and a half on Saturday, even though you didn't work 40 hours.

"They wanted to eliminate paying overtime unless you worked 40 hours during the week. The UAW agreed to that. And they agreed to that without the stipulation that if I come in on Saturday voluntarily and I missed during the week, you don't pay me overtime. But if it is mandatory, why wouldn't that be overtime?

"With this AWS, Stellantis is not even offering 40 hours during the week. How can you penalize me for not working 40 hours by not paying overtime on Saturday when 40 hours isn't even available?"

Beginning last week due to a shortage of critical computer chips, Stellantis shut down five North American assembly plants, including Warren Truck and Belvidere Assembly in the US. SHAP, which produces the highly profitable Dodge Ram light truck, is being

kept in operation, with chips and even temporary part-time workers from Warren Truck being shifted to the plant. The Ram vehicle accounts for a significant share of the company's profits, with sales up a record 28 percent for the first quarter, making the plant among the most strategically important in the country.

Protests by SHAP workers over the shredding of the eight-hour day have predictably evoked no response on the part of the UAW. A fact sheet distributed by a group of skilled trades workers pointed to the multiple ways the imposition of the 12-hour/seven-day schedule violated the UAW's own constitution and urged workers to lodge protests with the new UAW ethics officer. However, workers attempting to call the office were redirected to voice mail, and their calls were not returned.

Referring to the pending unionization vote at the Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama, the skilled trades worker remarked, "At Amazon I would be hard pressed to tell them to vote for a union. At this stage I don't see the benefit. I pay all this money every month, and I get a terrible deal? I could have done that for free."

The start of the 12/7 work schedule at SHAP comes just days after the release of the UAW's annual labor department filing for 2020. It shows that the union's 14 top officers raked in more than \$3 million in salaries and benefits in a year that saw unprecedented sickness and death in the auto plants with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The payouts included \$244,772 for UAW President Rory Gamble, who had at one point been named as a person of interest in a federal bribery investigation. UAW Vice President for Stellantis Cindy Estrada, whose private charity came under FBI scrutiny, made \$220,506. Estrada has studiously ignored direct appeals from SHAP workers to intervene to halt the 12/7 work schedule.

Workers have also pointed out the 12-hour day violates the UAW Local 1700 (SHAP) agreement with Stellantis/Fiat Chrysler, which stipulates that workers cannot be forced to work more than 10 hours a day or more than one Sunday per month. Under the UAW constitution, the international union is barred from imposing regressive changes to local agreements.

A statement issued by the SHAP Rank-and-File Safety Committee, founded last year by workers in

opposition to the treachery of the UAW, stressed the historic significance of the fight to defend the eight-hour workday.

"The very concept of such a long day represents a major step backwards. For more than 150 years, the eight-hour day has been a central demand of the organized workers movement, needed to limit the stress and strain on the body and permit time for recreation, family life and mental development."

The committee called for the development of maximum opposition in the auto plants from all workers to the 12-hour/seven-day schedule at SHAP under the principle an "injury to one is an injury to all."

"The defeat of the 12/7 schedule will not come through appeals to management, the establishment news media or the corrupt UAW, which has demonstrated it does not stand for us. We as workers must stand together, skilled trades and production, tier one and tier two, full time and temporary to demand with one voice the halt to this violation of our rights.

"The fight must not end here. We must oppose all unsafe conditions in the plant. In the first place, workers must have full and accurate real-time information about COVID-19 and have regular testing. We must 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. Whenever conditions are not safe, we have the right to collectively refuse to work without any threat of retaliation by management or the union." *To join the fight, or for more information, write to autoworkers@wsws.org.*



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact