

One week into 12-hour, seven-day schedule at Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly, workers describe manpower shortages, harassment

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Join the fight! The WSWS is assisting workers at Sterling Heights and other auto plants in organizing rank-and-file committees to oppose unsafe working conditions and the betrayals of the United Auto Workers. For more information, write to us at autoworkers@wsws.org .

After last week's beginning of mandatory 12-hour, seven-day work schedules without overtime for skilled trades, workers have reported overwork and manpower shortages at Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP).

While so-called "alternative work schedules" (AWS) have been used for production workers since the bailout of the auto industry under Obama in 2009, this is the first instance of it being applied to skilled trades, making it an important test case for the auto companies.

The imposition of the brutal 12/7 schedule has the full support of the United Auto Workers (UAW), which has maintained a total information blackout as problems mount at the plant that builds the highly profitable Dodge Ram 1500. The start of the new work schedule that includes four rotating shifts working seven days on and seven days off takes place as COVID-19 cases are exploding across the state of Michigan. Area auto plants have seen an up spike in cases as well, including at nearby Sterling Stamping .

Both Stellantis and the UAW claim that the schedule is allowable under the terms of the deliberately vague language on AWS slipped into the 2019 national contract.

Not only are the hours unbearable, but under the AWS, overtime for Saturday as well as work after eight hours have been abolished. The AWS is also a violation of the UAW constitution, which requires that rank-and-file workers be permitted to vote on regressive changes

to their local agreements. Instead, UAW Local 1700 forced skilled tradespeople to vote on *which* regressive AWS they found the least objectionable.

A SHAP skilled trades worker who wished to remain anonymous spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* about the impact of the 12/7 schedule.

"So far it's been a cluster f--k. New people in areas without training and breakdowns taking longer to repair. Morale is low. Many guys had the 'flu' the first day, but it wasn't organized.

"Most guys are saying they will not do overtime to cover when guys are missing. Management has already had to call and ask guys to come in and help, but all the ones I've talked to didn't answer the call."

He explained that lower-level managers were being adversely impacted by the shift to 12-hour shifts as well as production workers.

Stellantis management and the UAW are imposing a "team concept" on skilled trades, forcing workers to cover multiple job assignments, often without adequate training.

While double-time pay on Sunday still applies for production workers, it is not being paid to supervisors, who are increasingly restive.

The skilled trades worker reported: "Floor supervisors are all looking for the next job. I've had a couple tell me about other positions they are applying for. Production workers are also very upset about their situation and lack of union backbone. This is the perfect time to take a stand, but it's not happening.

"The SHAP paint shop was down for over 10 hours [Saturday] from 9 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. because of not having critical parts, costing the company millions, but

the maintenance manager is more concerned with the arrangement of trades toolboxes and types of chairs they have in their work areas.”

He continued, “[Top management] is directing a campaign of harassment against the skilled trades, and the UAW is doing absolutely nothing about it.

“Floor-level supervisors have discreetly informed trades that [a particular manager] is directly targeting trades because in his opinion we are overpaid and don’t provide value to the production of the final product. He, as we have been told, has directed his supervisors to make it hard on us. ...

“In the last two months, there have been many significantly long breakdowns that under the proper management of material and manpower would not have occurred. Yet their main focus has been to ‘straighten out’ the skilled trades.”

He said that while there was a total blackout on information on the spread of COVID-19 at the plant, “there were a couple cases of COVID reported today, but not from management or union. There are two guys out in my area today with possibly more coming.” Michigan is experiencing near-record levels of infections, and nearby Sterling Stamping Plant recorded its biggest month ever for new infections in March.

The SHAP skilled trades worker said he supported a unified fight by production and maintenance staff against the increasingly intolerable conditions being created at SHAP. “The production workers I have talked to are very unhappy with the situation...forced Saturdays, no opt-outs and a few other things. I had a conversation with a veteran worker who was very disappointed.”

While production workers in the plant are currently working traditional eight-hour days, they have been working forced overtime for months, working at least six days a week with 10-hour shifts on Fridays and Saturdays.

A production worker told the WSWS, “People in production know this will trickle down to us eventually. I keep telling people they will move us to 12-hour shifts as well, because otherwise it doesn’t make sense to have skilled trades on 12 and production on 8 or 10.

“The company can do what they want. There’s no real union present. They are cutting jobs in my department, even though we are working overtime. And they have even people here from Warren Truck [which

is currently idled due to the global semiconductor shortage]. They are cutting jobs and constantly bringing in new hires. All they want is trucks, and they put Band-Aids on everything else.”

Autoworker Newsletter articles reporting on the start of the 12/7 schedule at SHAP have evoked a strong response from autoworkers, and have been shared thousands of times on Facebook.

A SHAP worker posted, “I used to work 12 hours six days a week—our bodies [weren’t] built for that. Those who want to be able to start a lot of things in life can’t get [it]back such as time spent with children. ... I would rather I got that time. I missed post office working same hours, life is short; the company doesn’t care.”

A Ford worker wrote, “Wasn’t one of first things the UAW fought for straight 8’s and weekends off? I want to get at least some glimpse of life every day, not be a prisoner of the auto industry suffering for whatever days off I might get.”

A former Stellantis Jefferson North (JNAP) worker wrote, “And that’s why I quit after 7 years in 2019 at JANP. ... That job is slavery 12 hrs 7 days; yeah that’s total BS, making someone else rich.”

Others posted:

“I can’t believe its legal!” and “Who the hell wants to work seven days 12 hours!!!! They can go on with that they NOT gonna kill me !!

Also “I WILL choose my children over a schedule like this. Hard pass.”

One worker said there appeared to be a deliberate attempt to drive out older workers. “This is an intentional culling of the old culture legacy cost.

“I strongly believe this. It will happen at other plants. I wonder why Stellantis can’t hire tradesmen?” he asked ironically. “No retirement, medical cost. Wage inferior, corporate culture? ... What do you think?”



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