

Mandatory seven-day week until Christmas at Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly plant

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With the support of the United Auto Workers, Stellantis announced earlier this week that it is imposing a mandatory seven-day work schedule for all workers at its giant Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP) north of Detroit later this month. The plant builds the highly profitable Ram 1500 pickup truck, one of the company's best-selling vehicles.

The company said it was placing the plant in "critical status" for 90 days beginning September 25, allowing it to override contractual limits on mandatory overtime and weekend work. This would mean that employees will have to work every single day from September 25 to Christmas Eve, when the 90-day term expires.

The announcement was made as COVID-19 is once again on the upswing in Michigan. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services reports that 90 percent of counties are at high transmission levels and the number of active cases is up 26 percent from last week. The move, which affects 7,000 workers at the plant will undoubtedly contribute to a further rise in infections in the Detroit area.

The move to 7-day around the clock production at SHAP is in part a bid to make up production lost due to the shutdowns caused by the global shortage of computer microchips. The response of the auto industry to the shortage has been to prioritize their most profitable vehicles, idling other facilities for weeks and even months at a time in order to shift parts and even workers towards their biggest money-making plants. While the announcement was made at SHAP, additional down time has been scheduled again this month at Windsor Assembly across the border in Canada and at Jefferson North Assembly Plant in Detroit.

On this basis, in spite of the pandemic and the chip shortage, the automakers are posting record profits. Stellantis booked a "very strong" \$7 billion in profit for the first half of 2021.

Keeping SHAP operating at all times has been an imperative for Stellantis management this year, who have mandated weekend overtime for production workers for virtually the entire year. Management also imposed a new brutal 84 hour, 7 days on, 7 days off work schedule earlier this year for skilled trades in the plant, the first time that the company has implemented an alternative work schedule at a plant for skilled trades.

This breakneck pace did not slacken even during massive covid outbreaks inside the facility in the spring which led to as much as 10 percent of the workforce being out on quarantine at any given time. SHAP was the last major Stellantis plant to idle due to the chip shortage, when it finally shut down for two weeks in July and August.

One worker told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* that the reason for the "critical plant" status was attendance problems which have allegedly plagued SHAP this year, as workers quit or simply fail to show up out of sheer exhaustion. Another worker contends, "The problem isn't attendance. They cut all of these jobs and more cuts are going on." He said that earlier in the year, supervisors fanned out through the plant with clipboards looking for jobs to eliminate. "The problem is production. They have increased our quota from 1,200 to 1,300, to now 1,450 vehicles per day.

The imposition of these slave labor conditions is being done within the framework of the 2019 UAW contract, specifically, its hundreds of pages of side agreements, letter agreements and memoranda of understanding which occupy a whole 473-page volume unto themselves in the union's printed version of the contract.

On page 292, a memorandum on overtime allows the company, without even the pretense of requiring the approval of the union, to declare a facility a "critical plant," whose "output is essential to meeting the scheduled production of one or more other plants or of

customers, and as a result, must operate, in whole or in part, seven (7) days a week.” The designation of a “critical plant” allows the company to enforce mandatory overtime with no limits for a period of 90 days.

That the UAW would agree to such terms, and bury it in the finest of fine print (it goes without saying that it was not included in the bogus “highlights” package sent to autoworkers during the 2019 contract vote), demonstrates once again that the UAW is not a “union” at all, but a business unto itself, committed to jointly extracting as much profit as possible from the workers they falsely claim to represent.

The conditions being imposed upon workers at SHAP had been earlier pioneered in the parts industry, where even “union shops” routinely work seven-day weeks.

The 7-day schedule at SHAP is being imposed at the same time that workers at auto parts maker Dana Corp. are in a battle against the attempt by the UAW, the United Steelworkers and Dana management to impose a rotten contract that maintains poverty level wages and unlimited mandatory overtime. Dana auto parts workers voted down the deal by a nine to one margin, but the UAW and USW have refused to even raise the prospect of a strike, instead stringing workers out on a day-to-day extension of the old contract. Their strategy is to bleed workers’ momentum, while allowing the company to stockpile parts and make it through the critical period of the next month when the industry is changing over to next year’s models.

The announcement evoked many angry posts on Facebook, directed against both Stellantis and the UAW. One worker posted “The limited power (UAW Local)1700 had before covid was bad, now they are just an extension of management and I get more nervous seeing union on the floor than the supervisors.”

Another concurred, “you’re right, just like they’re allowed to do at [Stellantis] Warren Truck. They were in a launch and quit running the launch vehicle because of chips, then they started running the old vehicle, but the union’s letting them keep them under “launch” status [which eliminates normal restrictions on mandatory overtime], so they’re being told they won’t get a Saturday off until next June. They’ve been working like this for a while. They don’t like to excuse their personal days either. What kind of union doesn’t stand up to this bull crap?”

A SHAP worker told WSWs *Autoworker Newsletter*, “A lot of people say we won’t be able to see our kids. It was hard enough with 6 days. They were upset because people weren’t coming to work because they were tired

after 6 days. So I believe that’s why they went to critical status; they were being overworked with 6 days and now it’s 7.

“Things are at the breaking point. I used to work 7-days a week at a parts plant, 7 days 12-hours. I couldn’t keep doing it.

“They bargained everything away. I don’t see why they even still have a union. They’re trying to kill people now. People are living outside their means. They are taking advantage of people. I think they’re trying to weed out the weak. Trying to push people to quit.

“They shouldn’t have built production this way, off the backs of working people. They need to hire more people and get some more lines going.”

The entire auto industry, including both assembly workers and parts workers, must mobilize against the attempt to re-impose working conditions from a century ago, before the founding of the industrial unions. The eight-hour day, fought for by generations of workers has become a dead letter in the auto industry as a result of decades of collusion by the UAW with corporate management.

At Dana, workers have set up the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee to coordinate the fight by workers in different plants, share information and organize for a fight. SHAP workers must reach out to their brothers and sisters at Dana, in particular at feeder plants like Dana’s Warren, Michigan facility, to establish lines of communication and organize a common struggle against their common adversaries, the auto companies and the UAW.

We call on all autoworkers to join together in this fight. For more information contact the *Autoworker Newsletter* or the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee (DWRFC) and begin organizing a united movement against sweatshop conditions.

To email the DWRFC, email them at danawrfc@gmail.com or text to (248) 602-0936.



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