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Letter from a supplemental autoworker on 12-hour shifts at Warren Truck Assembly Plant

An autoworker
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The World Socialist Web Site is publishing the text of a letter submitted by a Supplemental worker at the Stellantis Warren Truck plant north of Detroit. Supplemental workers are a category of contingent employees, lacking most of the rights of full time workers.

COVID is currently rampant at Warren Truck, as the Omicron variant spread widely through communities, schools and factories. In order to maintain production, management, with the collaboration of the United Auto Workers, has mandated 12-hour shifts for temporary workers, compounding an already intolerable situation. The worker has asked that their name be withheld to prevent possible management/UAW retaliation.

To send us your own story about conditions at your plant, email us today at autoworkers@wsws.org. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

I am a Supplemental (“aka TPT”) employee at Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant located on Mound Road in Warren, Michigan. I have been a supplementary employee for almost a year. During this time, I have been on a mandatory 6-day/7-day work schedule, working 10 hours a day, averaging between 50–70 hours per week. On January 3, 2022, Warren Truck’s production schedule changed from running 2 shifts, each 10 hours in length, to 3 shifts each 8 hours in length. On January 4, 2022, at 5:01PM I was notified via email that I am being required to work a Mandatory 6-day, 12-hour shift effective Wednesday, January 5, 2022.

During the 12 hours of work, I am only allotted two 10-minute breaks and a 20-minute lunch period. At the risk of losing my job, I have attached a copy of the email from the Warren Truck Assembly Plant Business Resource team which outlines the new production schedule. Now that the plant is running 24 hours a day, I am constantly being forced to interact with more and more people that I normally do not see, therefore increasing the likelihood that I will be exposed to COVID-19.

Also, the company does not provide us any additional time to thoroughly disinfect our workstations. I am required to perform my job using the same tools as the operator on the previous shift, with again no time allotted to clean the tools or workstation. As of today,

January 6, 2022, rumor has it that upwards of 500 of my union brothers and sisters are either ill or are quarantining due to being exposed to the COVID-19 virus. When I arrive at work, I am being forced to work in different stations multiple times per day, being forced to work with different people, which is increasing the probability that I too will come down with COVID-19.

During the past year I have put my health and my life in extreme danger for the better of the company. Every day before I leave for work, I am mandated to complete a COVID-19 self-screening questionnaire before I am authorized to enter the facility. If I do not complete the questionnaire, a follow-up email will be sent to me stating the importance of completing the survey. However, the company is not concerned whether I have COVID symptoms or am deathly ill, their only concern is for Audit purposes.

I am provided a thin surgical mask for my protection and to keep me safe while at work. One day I wore an N95 respirator to work (similar to what nurses are currently wearing to keep safe while treating covid patients) and I was told I could not enter the facility with that mask, and I must wear the company-issued mask. I followed orders as usual.

As I walk into the plant and head to my workstation, I walk over the same garbage on the floor that I have seen since before the December Holidays. When we get a very bad storm with heavy rainfall, the roof leaks an incredible amount of water; often times directly in my workstation. The men’s bathrooms in some of the production areas have not had warm running water for months. Some would call the plant extremely filthy, but I assure you that is an understatement. I have contracted COVID-19 at least one time during my employment at Stellantis, and I am 99% positive I was infected by my coworkers. As a Supplemental employee if I do not show up to work, I do not get paid. The Union officials have stated that if an employee tests positive for COVID due to being exposed inside the plant that partial compensation will be paid to that employee.

However, as I am shuffled from job to job on a daily basis it would be very difficult for me to prove that I contracted the virus inside the plant. If my co-worker tests positive for COVID, I am not informed of the situation, and am not being told to self-quarantine. How ironic, I

know.

Management and our Local 140 leadership refuse to inform employees of how bad it is inside the plant. It is just business as usual. It is very apparent to myself and my coworkers that this extreme abuse and neglect for the health and safety of the workers will not end unless something drastic happens that forces their arm into shut down. Even then, I am almost certain that Stellantis Upper Management will not shut down and cancel production without a fight.

During this past year supplemental employees were also forced to temporarily relocate to the Sterling Heights Assembly Plant and the Mack Detroit Assembly Complex to reduce the impact of absenteeism. Both times the company did not provide more than a couple days' notice and they clearly did not care about our health and well being, as they forced us to expose ourselves to new COVID super spreader environments all while Dr. Anthony Fauci and the CDC were strongly recommending that everyone needs to be social distancing and limiting in-person contact.

During this pandemic Stellantis has clearly forced many workers to their death bed and should be held liable for their neglect. A joke that never gets old inside the plant is that "At Warren Truck we don't make sense, we make trucks."

In the fall of 2021, the company hired supplementary employees which were designated to work the upcoming third shift in January. During that time, my union brothers and sisters were forced to train the new employees, which meant doubling up on every station, stripping away our ability to social distance. The only true tool we have as human beings to fight the pandemic and keep ourselves safe is our ability to social distance. The company did not offer any additional incentives during the weeks long training period. I was required to work within arms reach of another employee all the while practicing social distancing.

The (UAW) Local 140 Union has been incredibly silent and have not helped or even attempted to help or look out for the interests of supplementary employees. In December 2021, while we were being forced to work mandatory 7-day schedules, our union president, Eric Graham, was on the beach in Jamaica taking photos and posting them to Facebook. Which isn't surprising since there are whispers going around the plant that International UAW has plans to promote Eric to the international level.

This actually makes me sick to my stomach. The only person that has advocated on the supplementary employee's behalf is a Seniority employee in our paint shop who has started a petition demanding a reasonable limit to the overtime hours and days that can be scheduled and in advance. The petition also recognizes that everything Stellantis is doing to its employees may in fact comply with the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Ask any union official and they will say that the contract is the contract and there's nothing anybody can do to put an end to this madness.

On page 213 of the Union Contract, one would find the MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) per the Supplemental Agreement that was agreed upon by the International UAW and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles. All parties agreed that the MOU shall govern the employment of such Supplemental Employees. The very first paragraph clearly states that Supplemental Employees are not to be employed to avoid hiring to fill permanent positions.

This agreement is supposed to be administered by the National Attendance Council ("NAC") which consists of two (2) members of the International Union and two (2) members of the company. They are supposed to have quarterly meetings, where the NAC would

monitor the use of Supplemental Employees at each plant. My understanding of this Memorandum is that the plant can only have so many supplemental employees per the population of full-time employees.

It is pretty clear that the number of Supplemental Employees working at the Warren Truck Assembly Plant far exceeds the allowable amount. (Rumor has it that Stellantis is refusing to transition supplementary employees to full time employees due to the issues with the global supply chains, cannot be confirmed because the Local 140 Union will not provide these figures to the union members.)

One would think that during a pandemic where supplemental employees are putting their lives on the line, Union leadership and management would be fighting to provide the workers with better health coverage and an increase in wages so they no longer need to struggle to make ends meet. I never imagined that a McDonald's Worker or an Amazon Worker would be offered better incentives than an employee of the world's third-largest automaker. I implore Upper Stellantis Management, the International Union, and the Local 140 Union to step up and do the right thing. I have attached a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding for your viewing.

The UAW has lost its status as being a strong union because of all the corruption at the international level and the actions of our local union leaders. This neglectful behavior of numerous employers has been going on across the country and workers in all different industries have said enough is enough and have voted to Strike. They are standing together as all unions should. Maybe it's time we autoworkers take a page out of John Deere's UAW playbook and form our own "Rank and File" committee.

Currently, the UAW workers have a no-strike clause. The only way around this clause is to cite and reference safety issues inside the plant. Well, if 500 plus and counting employees are out of work at Warren Truck due to the lack of health and safety protocols currently implemented inside the plant doesn't warrant a potential strike vote, nothing will and Stellantis will run us to the grave.

Thank you for listening to my rant. I have to go to sleep now as I have another 12 hour shift ahead of me.



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