

Workers respond to mandatory 7-day schedule at Stellantis plants: “I don’t think workers realize the power we have”

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Are you an autoworker? We want to hear from you: Fill out the form at the end to tell us what your working conditions are like. For more information about joining the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee, call or text 248-919-8448.

Stellantis workers at two Detroit-area auto plants are voicing outrage over management’s decision to force the facilities onto mandatory seven-day work schedules with up to 12-hour shifts each day. The highly provocative move is viewed as part of the company’s preparations for a potential strike in September when the national auto contracts expire.

Formal contract talks are due to open July 13. The UAW usually designates a target company ahead of the contract expiration date. In 2015 Fiat-Chrysler, which merged with the PSA Group in 2021 to become Stellantis, was the designated target.

Last week, Stellantis announced that it was placing the Warren Truck Assembly Plant (WTAP) and the Jefferson North plant, the latter part of the Detroit Manufacturing Complex, into “critical status” for 90 days from July 5 through October 2. Under terms of the 2019 national contract agreed to by the UAW, this allows seven-day operation of plants for 90 days, lifts restrictions on forced overtime and limits the use of vacation and personal absence days.

In a statement, Stellantis said it was ramping up production “due to high demand for the Wagoneer, Grand Wagoneer and Jeep Grand Cherokee.” Stellantis said that it was short 17,871 units of the Wagoneer and Grand Wagoneer models.

Workers widely see the imposition of a seven-day schedule as an attempt by the company to stockpile inventory in anticipation of a strike as well as a means of intimidation. Notably, the United Auto Workers leadership has said nothing about Stellantis’ invocation of “critical status” despite all of its fake militant rhetoric.

Adding to workers’ anger, Stellantis laid off the third shift at Warren Truck last year. The company also closed the Belvidere Assembly Plant in February, which built the Jeep Cherokee. In both cases the UAW did nothing to oppose the job cuts. A number of the laid off Belvidere workers have now taken transfers to Warren Truck and other Detroit-area plants.

A report published by the Reuters news agency Wednesday noted the mounting anger among autoworkers over the announcement of “critical status.” It cited a statement issued last week by the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee opposing the

seven-day schedule that stated, “The company executives are doing this to build up inventory ahead of a potential strike. They are trying to intimidate us because we will not accept another sellout contract from the United Auto Workers.”

A worker at Jefferson North confirmed that the plant would be going on seven-day operation after the July 4 holiday. “I don’t think we should do this; it will wear people out,” the worker commented. Workers also report that nonunion contractors have been hired to install missing parts.

At the same time that the company will be imposing mandatory overtime, workers report that many vehicles are sitting in storage for lack of components. The Jefferson worker added, “The suppliers won’t be able to keep up. As it is now we are often sent home because of lack of parts. It is a crazy world.”

Apparently anticipating a high rate of absenteeism due to the grueling work schedule, Stellantis has recently begun hiring large numbers of temporary part-time (TPT) workers, or “supplementals.” In some cases these new hires have been given 40-hour work schedules, passing over more senior workers, who have been limited to two days.

A young TPT worker and member of the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*, “It doesn’t matter what the contract says, we have 1,500 TPTs per shift. They just brought in two new groups of TPTs.

“They can force TPTs to work 12 hours. Technically it is 12 and a half hours because there is an unpaid 30-minute lunch. We will probably be forced to work 12 hours, seven days a week.

“If we are overworked and tired that may create dangerous conditions. We work with machinery. But, do you think they care? They can just get rid of us no matter how hard we work.

“Is our physical well-being worth a little bigger paycheck when most of that extra money will go to taxes?”

The UAW granted auto companies the right to arbitrarily abolish limits on work time through “critical status” in language secretly inserted into the 2019 contract. The fact that the UAW bureaucracy would agree to such abusive conditions is a further demonstration that this organization has nothing to do with workers’ interests and that workers can place no confidence in it. It underscores the need for workers to build and expand the network of rank-and-file committees in advance of the contract expiration.

The Warren Truck worker said, “Management and the UAW use a lot of fear-mongering. They make you feel that if you make the wrong move you will be out the door. The UAW reps are MIA all day.

“People don’t realize how much wealth this plant accumulates, while we are settling for bread crumbs. I don’t think workers realize the power we have.

“The tiers are used to separate us. They want it to stay like that, the UAW doesn’t want it to change.”

Another member of the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee said, “Currently TPTs can be moved down to 2 days a week to transfer people in and out of the plant to make sure all temps are trained on full time jobs to help cover absenteeism during the critical status.

“Most UAW stewards are buddy, buddy with supervisors and other management, making members feel like they are not being represented as we should. There are times when we will go most of the week without seeing our UAW reps on the floor.

“When issues are brought to the unions attention such as harassment or conflict with fellow workers or supervisors, instead of getting to the issues and resolving them the union will move members to other departments regardless if they want it or not.”

Pointing to the recent unhealthy air quality in the Detroit area due to the Canadian wildfires, he added, “With air quality issues, we are still being forced to work as smoke from outside fills the plant.”

“Everybody’s pissed about this ‘critical status’”

“I’m a TPT so I don’t get paid as much as the full-time people,” a worker at the Detroit Assembly Complex – Jefferson plant said. “To maintain my livelihood that I had before I worked at Stellantis, I have to work two jobs. It’s hard and I’m lucky my other job is a little more understanding about my scheduling. I try to work both my jobs on the same day no more than three days a week. I still have to get some sleep in somewhere.

“I’ve only ever worked 10-hour shifts, so it’s going to be something new when we go back to 12 hours. I don’t know how that’s going to play out.

“Everybody’s pissed about this ‘critical status.’ I’m scared. I am going to try to hang in there as long as I can but you know, as a TPT, I’m mandated. I have to be at work regardless, no matter what. If my mama dies, I still have to be there. So it’s really hard and Stellantis doesn’t care about any of that.

“We all want to know, why is the union allowing this to go down like this? They sure do get our dues money every month. They make us TPTs feel like we’re just hired help. I’m a TPT so the union don’t really talk to me. I don’t really know what’s going on most of the time. I pay dues, but the UAW don’t really talk to us TPTs like that.

“I was told we couldn’t even really vote in the last vote we had on the president. A bunch of us TPTs got mad, like, why are we even going to go cast a vote for anything if we can only vote for

certain people? It was just going around the plant that TPTs couldn’t vote.

“What I keep hearing about the contract is that we possibly might strike but I don’t know what’s on the agenda. What are they trying to reconcile, what are they trying to put new on the contract? The UAW don’t really discuss a lot of that stuff with us.

“A lot of the old heads [legacy workers] tell me that the tier system didn’t even used to exist. We’re doing the same jobs, so we should be making the same amount of money. That’s what we all feel.”

“The UAW is allowing us to be mistreated in so many ways”

A worker at the Stellantis parts distribution center in Centerline outside Detroit said she and her co-workers were outraged to hear that plants were being put on critical status. She said she had been moved after reading the statement by the Warren Truck Rank-and-File Committee.

“That article hit home,” she said. “It said what everyone is feeling.

“I want to support the fight. This is not right. Twelve hours doesn’t leave any time for your family. They can force you to work 30 days straight with only one day off, that is awful. They should never have allowed it in the contract.”

She spoke about conditions at her workplace. “In March the company made an announcement that we couldn’t use our PA [personal absence] days until further notice. They are not respecting seniority with respect to jobs. The union tells us ‘seniority doesn’t matter.’

“The company is just using the union to keep control over us. The power is in the people. To force us to work all these hours isn’t reasonable.”

“If the UAW won’t even fight for PA days why should we believe they will fight for anything in the national contract?”

She said that many workers had come to the parts center from the Belvidere plant in Illinois.

“The UAW is allowing us to be mistreated in so many ways. Workers had to move to Texas, Michigan, Florida when Belvidere closed. Some couldn’t relocate and lost their jobs. To be uprooted and then to be treated like you are not appreciated is awful. But they are getting away with it.”

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