

“We had one guy die and two or three come close to dying”

As contract battle heats up, Dana workers describe working through the COVID pandemic

George Kirby
25 August 2021

In comments during a conference call on Dana's second-quarter profits last month, company CEO James Kamsickas told Wall Street investors, “We continue to actively manage through a challenging supply-chain environment, and our team has done an excellent job proactively responding to the regional impacts of COVID-19.”

While the corporate CEO, who has a net worth of at least \$25 million, no doubt worked from the safety of his luxurious home, Dana workers have been sickened, and an unknown number have died from COVID-19 at the company's plants in the US and around the world. With the collusion of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and United Steelworkers (USW) unions, Dana has concealed information about outbreaks and kept its factories running with few if any safety measures.

Workers have informed the *World Socialist Web Site* that some plants, including the one in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, remained open using “volunteer” temporary workers during the two-month shutdown of the auto industry between mid-March and May 2020. After a wave of strikes in Italy, Spain and other countries, autoworkers in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and other states forced the temporary shutdown of the industry with a series of wildcat strikes in defiance of the UAW.

Around 8,500 Dana workers are now engaged in a struggle to prevent Dana, the UAW and USW from imposing yet another pro-company labor agreement, which would maintain poverty wages and sweatshop conditions. Workers who spoke to the WSWS are also concerned about the continued spread of the deadly virus inside their factories and children's schools.

“It's absolutely terrible in our shop,” a 20-year Dana worker from the Ft. Wayne plant said. “We probably have 50+ cases out of less than 900 people. The GM plant here in Ft. Wayne has over 200 cases, and they've got well over 2,000 people at their plant. Being on the floor you don't know who has it and who doesn't. The union used to post cases in a handout on Thursdays, but since early last year we haven't seen anything. To know who is sick we hear it from fellow workers on the floor.”

A fellow worker from Ft. Wayne added, “A lot of times they [management & union] won't even tell us who is infected until days later. That's after we find out from other employees, who have talked to the infected employee. We call out the company, and they have somebody tell us, ‘We didn't know.’ With one case we talked to a worker after the fact. He told us he talked to the safety person. So, they basically lied to our face all the time.”

Another worker at the plant said, “During the early part of the pandemic I worked 12 hours and six days a week. Then the company provided two months for some workers. The Tier Two workers couldn't afford to take time off during the shutdown. They had layoffs during the shutdown with voluntary shifts. Many people were forced to work due to their economic situation.

“More than 80 years after the founding of the UAW, the union is now like the slave holder. We shouldn't have to work 60-70 hours a week. The company asks for more parts, while the union doesn't do anything. I'm sick of the union and company. I feel sorry for Tier

Two workers. Most make barely \$20, which is poverty wages. I read workers at the UAW plants wanted the United Steelworkers, but they're all the same! The union officials make seven figures, while we bust our asses for the minimum wage."

A Dana worker from Paris, Tennessee spoke about COVID-19 inside his plant. "There's been a bunch. I know we had one guy die. We had two or three come close to dying. Some are still in the ICU. They do [have protocols], but they're really loose with it, and it's not consistent at all. If someone goes home sick with COVID, they don't clean the press they were at or anything, and they put somebody else right back on it." He added, "The ladies who do clean were told only to clean the breakroom."

One of the Ft. Wayne workers described the sweatshop conditions in his plant. "As far as our work conditions, I am assuming that they're just as bad as anywhere else. If we don't meet our quota for each line, the foremen get absolutely upset. The plant manager freaks out, and then they start picking on us and start threatening us with write-ups. Or they just nitpick everything and just start yelling at our workers. Our plant manager that we have had for the last year or so is the worst plant manager I've ever seen in my 28 years at Dana. We don't have him anymore. He was moved to be a higher boss over the plant manager."

Even as the UAW and USW move to ram through another pro-company contract, they are colluding with Dana and the Detroit automakers to keep workers in the factories producing profits while infection rates and deaths due to the more virulent Delta variant are skyrocketing. Allen County, Indiana, which includes Ft. Wayne, saw a spike of 2,714 infections between August 11 and August 24. On Monday, the Indiana Department of Health (IDOH) reported that nearly 2,000 Indiana schools reported COVID-19 cases, with 3,504 new student cases and 172 among teachers and staff. In the capital, Indianapolis, there are 36 children in ICUs at Riley Hospital.

On Sunday, the WSWS hosted the forum For a Global Strategy to Stop the Pandemic and Save Lives, which included presentations by three scientists who explained that an emergency coordination in the beginning of the pandemic would have eliminated the virus within months. Instead, both corporate-controlled parties rejected the necessary measures to eradicate the

virus because they would interfere with the profit interests of the giant companies. While handing out trillions to Wall Street and corporations like Dana, the Trump administration and now the Biden administration allowed more than 630,000 people in the US to unnecessarily die.

Despite the impact of the pandemic, Dana had \$7.1 billion in sales and gross earnings of \$593 million in 2020. With a sharp increase in demand from auto manufacturers this year, the company has recorded \$4.5 billion in sales and \$484 million in gross earnings in the first six months of 2021 alone. Now the company, with the full backing of the UAW and USW, is seeking to double down by pressing for even longer working hours and pay raises well below the rate of inflation.

The Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee has been formed to take the conduct of the struggle out of the hands of the pro-corporate unions and fight for what workers need. The battle against poverty wages and brutal exploitation must be fused with the struggle of workers to shut schools and nonessential industries and secure full income for all affected workers and small business owners until the pandemic can be eradicated. The vast expansion of global vaccinations must be combined with strict lockdown measures, contact tracing and universal testing to end the spread of the virus and wipe it out.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact