

# US auto parts workers rebel against Dana Inc. and the unions

Eric London  
29 August 2021

Thousands of Dana auto parts workers across the United States are voting to reject the five-year sweatshop contract that the United Auto Workers (UAW) and United Steelworkers (USW) are trying to force through.

Major plants have already voted “no” by overwhelming margins, including Pottstown, Pennsylvania; Fort Wayne, Indiana; Paris, Tennessee; Warren, Michigan; and Danville, Kentucky. Workers at other plants will be voting early this week.

This rebellion against Dana, the UAW and USW is a powerful step forward for Dana workers and for the international working class. After 18 months of a pandemic that has killed over 650,000 people in the US and more than 4 million worldwide, the “no” vote is a sign of a growing sense in the working class that massive levels of social inequality are intolerable, and that something must be done.

The reality at Dana explodes the arguments of groups like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and publications like *Jacobin* and *Left Voice*, which falsely present the trade unions as “workers’ organizations.”

At informational meetings held Sunday to discuss a proposed five-year contract, overworked and exhausted workers erupted at UAW and USW officials, who refused to let workers see the full contract and are collaborating with management by requiring overtime to help the company stockpile products in case of a strike. Concerned that the UAW and USW will commit ballot fraud, workers at many plants took the independent initiative to send delegations of rank-and-file workers to monitor the counting of votes.

Workers are rebelling against conditions that bring to mind the work of turn-of-the-20th-century muckrakers like photographer Jacob Riis or author Upton Sinclair. Sinclair’s 1906 novel *The Jungle* described unsafe,

unsanitary and exhausting conditions confronting immigrant workers in Chicago’s back-of-the-yards meatpacking district that would be very familiar to Dana workers today. The fact that conditions in 2021 are arguably worse than before the rise of industrial unions is a product of decades of betrayals carried out by the AFL-CIO and trade unions everywhere.

In this “union shop,” Dana workers receive only one unpaid day off every three months. They regularly work 20, 40 or even 60 days in a row without a break, with shifts as long as 12 hours. Workers pass out from heat exhaustion, suffer heart attacks, seizures or contract COVID-19 on the job while the USW and UAW keep production moving, no matter the cost to human life.

The company and union treat workers worse than animals. When Dry Ridge, Kentucky Dana worker Danny Walters had a seizure at work, neither the company nor the UAW called his wife to inform her. The worker received a notification hours after his death saying he had been mandated to come to work the next day. Dana workers view Walters’ premature death as a symbol of the many layers of injustice they continue to face every day and have pledged to carry forward their struggle in his name.

Such horror stories are common at Dana plants, which workers call “slave ships,” “prisons” and “sweatshops.” Workers are paid next to nothing while the company’s CEO, Trump supporter James Kamsickas, made over \$10 million in 2020, and while the company doles out tens of millions in dividend payouts to wealthy shareholders. The company received \$9 million in funding from the bipartisan corporate bailout known as the CARES Act, while production continued through the entire pandemic.

Workers confront not only one ruthless company, but

the entire capitalist system. The extreme exploitation of Dana workers is not the exception under capitalism, but the rule. As millions die preventable deaths from the pandemic, this law of capitalist exploitation has propelled governments across the world to enact policies that the BMJ (formerly *British Medical Journal*) described as “social murder”—forcing students back to school so that their parents can go back to work to be exploited for profit, even amid the spread of the deadly Delta variant.

The policy of the ruling class is to guarantee corporate profit and fuel the astronomical rise of global stock exchanges, no matter how many millions die.

Dana workers have begun to coalesce around a committee established by Dana workers from critical plants across the country. The Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee (DWRFC) has won wide support by raising the demand for an 8-hour day and 40-hour week, as well as 75 percent raises and workers’ control over plant safety during the pandemic.

Many Dana workers report that the *World Socialist Web Site* has been an invaluable tool in their struggle, providing guidance and information about the company as well as that related to the experience of past struggles. Dana workers have been studying the lessons from the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), established by Virginia workers during their struggle against the company and the UAW, as well as the lessons of the 2019 wildcat strike of auto parts workers in Matamoros, Mexico.

The struggle at Dana is part of a growing international rebellion of workers across the world. An IMF report published last week warned that the world is in the midst of a massive eruption of the class struggle. The report says the number of general strikes and mass protests has skyrocketed by a “staggering 244 percent” between 2011, the year of the Arab Spring, and 2019. Of particular concern for the financial aristocracy: “The number of general strikes increased by 821 per cent.”

On International Workers’ Day 2021—May Day—the International Committee of the Fourth International called for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, or IWA-RFC. The ICFI wrote:

The IWA-RFC will work to develop the framework for new forms of independent, democratic and militant rank-and-file organizations of workers in factories, schools and workplaces on an international scale. The working class is ready to fight. But it is shackled by reactionary bureaucratic organizations that suppress every expression of resistance.

It will be a means through which workers throughout the world can share information and organize a united struggle to demand protection for workers, the shutdown of unsafe facilities and nonessential production, and other emergency measures that are necessary to stop the spread of the virus.

The rebellion at Dana confirms the need for the development of an international alliance of committees to direct the struggle of the working class. The Socialist Equality Party and the WSWS are committed to assisting Dana workers and all workers in establishing and building a network of rank-and-file committees in the US and throughout the world.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**