

Defiance grows among Dana auto parts workers as union-backed sellout deal appears headed for massive defeat

Tom Hall
30 August 2021

A spirit of determination is growing among Dana auto parts workers, as early returns in balloting for a new five-year concessions contract backed by the United Auto Workers and United Steelworkers show the deal headed towards a massive defeat. Balloting continues throughout this week and is expected to wrap up by Thursday.

As of Sunday evening, posted results from plants around the country show an 80 percent “no” vote, with 803 voting against and only 202 workers voting in favor, according to analysis performed by the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. No plant has been confirmed to have voted in favor of the deal.

The following is the breakdown of the voting from Sunday on the national or “global” contract:

- Danville, Kentucky - 67% No to 33% Yes (number of votes not released)
- Lima, Ohio - 68% No to 32% Yes (number of votes not released)
- Paris, Tennessee - 83% No to 17% Yes (174 to 35)
- Pottstown, Pennsylvania - 79% No to 21% Yes (157 to 42)
- Fort Wayne, Indiana - 90% No to 10% Yes (362 to 39)
- Warren, Michigan - 56% No to 44% Yes (110-86)

According to claims by local union officials, which have not been verified, a rejection of the global agreement requires a two-thirds majority “no” vote by the plants covered in the agreement. There are approximately 3,500 active workers at more than a dozen plants covered by the UAW and USW contracts.

Dana workers are gearing up for a fight against working conditions which rival those of the *early* nineteenth century, with many being forced to work for weeks at a time without a single day off for shifts that can last up to twelve hours. This not only leaves workers with next to no time for family and personal lives, but produces tragic human consequences, such as the death of Danny Walters, a worker at the Dry Ridge, Kentucky plant who died in June after suffering a seizure at work. The contract, details of which the unions only began to publish on Friday, does nothing to resolve any of these issues while providing for pay increases below the rate of inflation.

Throughout the process, the UAW and USW have sought to bully and lie their way into passing the contract. They have portrayed the deal as Dana's “last and best” offer, claiming the only alternative is a lengthy and fruitless strike. However, this only demonstrates the determination of the privileged union bureaucrats to suppress, isolate and betray the growing struggle by Dana workers. Among workers, however, desire for a strike is widespread, alongside with distrust and hostility towards any “leadership” of a strike provided by the UAW and USW.

“You cannot get the union to do anything, it's really pissing me off,” one worker from the Paris, Tennessee plant said. “We would have had them by the balls if the union did something. The UAW says no one wants a strike. But we could. It seems like a conflict of interest. How can they be our representatives and own shares of [General Motors?].”

This shows how the unions not only identify their own interests with the company's “bottom line,” but how they work with management to whipsaw workers from other companies into a race to the bottom. The UAW betrayed a whole series of strikes by auto parts workers in the 1980s, including the AP Parts strike in Toledo, Ohio, paving the way for massive wage cutting aimed at reducing costs for the Big Three Detroit automakers. In 2007, UAW and the USW agreed to a four-year deal for Dana workers, which saved the company roughly \$100 million a year by introducing a new two-tier wage structure, sharply reducing medical benefits, closing factories and forcing thousands to take early retirements. A year later, the UAW betrayed the bitter 87-day strike at American Axle, paving the way for a further round of massive wage cuts throughout the auto and auto parts industries.

The intimidation by the unions, however, has failed spectacularly due to the independent initiative taken by Dana workers to break through their lies and build up lines of communication both inside their own plants and with workers at other plants. At Toledo, UAW officials attempted to claim to workers that a “yes” vote at facilities such as Fort Wayne was all but assured, making a “no” vote at their own plant moot. This was quickly debunked by Fort Wayne workers themselves, who voted down the contract by the largest margin thus far.

The most advanced expression of this growing rebellion is the formation of the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which is striving to provide the growing movement with a common strategy and organization. Significantly, workers at many plants over the weekend sought to put into practice the Committee's call for rank-and-file monitoring of balloting. At plants which are voting later in the week, plans are already being firmed up by workers to monitor the balloting in order to prevent fraud by the union.

The Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee issued an additional statement early Monday evening demanding that the unions call a strike no later than Thursday in the likely event of the contract's rejection, and called upon workers at plants across the country to elect their own rank-and-file strike committees.

"The union was very surprised about the result," the Paris worker said. "The union has been the middle-man for these plants, and now we are starting to unite, and they hate that. The rank-and-file [committee] is uniting us. They don't even tell us the results at other plants. [The union is] keeping us separated when this is a time to come together. That's why I love the rank-and-file committee. When we come together you can't feed us BS. I love that the union doesn't like it.'

Balloting continues on Tuesday at Louisville, Kentucky, and on Wednesday at St. Clair and Auburn Hills in Michigan. The Dry Ridge, Kentucky plant is also scheduled to vote on Wednesday, where outrage over Danny Walters' death is almost certain to drive the deal to a large defeat.

St. Clair workers also report widespread anger after highlights were finally released at the plant on Monday. "They looked at it and said it's an insult," one worker said. "A lot of people are trying to play a little game, to try to beat the margin of the no vote at the Fort Wayne plant." Workers expressed concern for the plight of older workers in their plant, who are forced to work difficult physical jobs even when easier jobs are available.

At the plant in Toledo, Ohio, the UAW only announced late on Monday that balloting would take place on Thursday. On Monday, the plant bargaining committee sent out a nervous and highly defensive statement, claiming that it was "not withholding information" because "nothing was finalized" about the local TA. "We know you have a lot of questions which will be addressed once things are finalized and a meeting is set. However, we cannot and will not go into these details on social media, which we hope you understand."

UAW Local 12 is notorious for collaborating with the auto bosses. It oversaw the isolation and betrayal of the AP Parts strike in 1984. Last year, Fiat Chrysler (now Stellantis) workers flooded into the Local 12 office at the Jeep plant to denounce local officials for keeping them on the job as the pandemic spread through the plant. There is little doubt that Local 12 officials are plotting with Dana and the UAW International executives at the Detroit Solidarity House headquarters to ram

the contract through, by hook or by crook.

"Everyone is getting frustrated," a Toledo worker said. "People are even asking for a recount on the election for our bargaining committee. We are asking questions and getting no answers. We have no clue why we haven't seen anything, why we are the last to vote.

"There are just rumors. One rumor is that they are not even negotiating the contract, because they are not communicating with us at all. They are saying they are not withholding information, but they tell us nothing. We are working seven days and a lot of people are exhausted. I'm thinking they are allowing the company to stockpile parts to take away our leverage if we strike. We supply Jeep and Ford.

"We are the only plant that is not under the national contract. We are under a 'standard contract' [The plant opened in 2017 and just became UAW in 2018]. Our contract was pieced together. When we voted it was new to us. We were uneducated.

"They have brought in a lot of temporary workers. We are only supposed to have a certain percentage of temps, but they are ignoring that. They are firing the high seniority people to try to get rid of them for attendance problems and other petty things. It's a strategy to bring in workers who know nothing about the contract to have a chance of getting it passed.

"You get six points and you are fired. They are very strict. You miss a half a day, that's half a point. You miss the whole day, that's a whole point. If you are late and don't call in, that's a point and a write up. We are working seven days a week, no unpaid time off. Vacation is horrible. Our vacation starts over in January, [not from] your hire date."

"I think everyone is on board with a 'no.' People are tired of being screwed over. The big thing is communication."

To get more information and to join the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email us at DanaWRFC@gmail.com or text (248) 602-0936?.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact