

Dana workers reject sweatshop contract pushed by UAW and USW

Tom Hall
1 September 2021

Dana Inc. auto parts workers rejected the sweatshop contract proposed by the UAW and USW yesterday, with major plants voting the contract down by as much as 97 percent. Although the contract has now been officially rejected, the UAW and USW are still telling workers to report to work under endless “day-by-day” extensions.

Workers are rebelling against a sweatshop contract, which includes wage increases below the rate of inflation, increases to medical co-pays, new corporatist union-management “partnerships,” including a new committee for outsourcing jobs, and the potential reduction of overtime pay through the introduction of a new Alternative Work Schedule. Most of all, workers are outraged over their inhuman working hours. They are often forced to work for weeks on end without a single day off, for up to 12 hours per shift, conditions which harken back to the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution in the 1820s.

Several major plants voted “no” in the last 48 hours, including Louisville and Dry Ridge, Kentucky and St. Clair, Michigan.

Workers in Louisville voted 75 percent “no” in balloting Tuesday night and early Wednesday morning. Later in the afternoon, workers at St. Clair, Michigan voted down the global agreement by a staggering 145 “no” votes to 4 “yes.” This shatters the previous record of a 9-to-1 “no” margin set by workers at Fort Wayne, Indiana, a record which St. Clair workers had said they were eager to beat. Late Wednesday, results from Dry Ridge showed a 71 percent “no” vote.

It was the vote at Dry Ridge which formally confirmed the contract had been legally rejected. It is fitting that the contract was defeated in Dry Ridge, since it was here that Danny Walters, after suffering a seizure on the job, passed away on June 2.

With only Toledo, Ohio and Columbia, Missouri left to vote Thursday, the rebellion by Dana workers is reaching a new stage. Among the rank and file, there is growing confidence in their own power and overwhelming support for a strike to end their slave-labor conditions once and for all.

But the UAW and USW, together with management, are also digging in their heels, desperate to halt a workers’ offensive before it results in a nationwide strike. They are ramping up a campaign of bullying and intimidation against workers.

The most notorious incident took place yesterday at the plant in Lima, Ohio, when UAW Local 1765 President P.J. Meyer verbally assaulted a female worker over an innocent question she asked of the union on social media. The confrontation took place while the woman was at work on the line, in full view of several co-workers.

One man who witnessed the incident told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Meyer was yelling so loud that their entire line could hear him threatening to “whip her ass” for exercising her First Amendment rights.

According to the worker, this is the second such incident at the Lima plant in recent days. The vice president of the local also allegedly has yelled at workers for their free speech activity on social media.

The Lima incident was followed by an explosive informational meeting Wednesday afternoon in Toledo. Workers, who were infuriated by the experience, say that union officials cursed at them in the course of their own evasive responses, then abruptly shut the meeting down.

Even though balloting in Toledo was scheduled to begin before 7:00 a.m. Thursday morning, workers had still not received copies of the contract. They were told at the meeting that they would be sent electronic copies

“later in the day” if they left their email addresses while signing in—meaning workers who were unable to attend the meeting will not even receive a copy.

Workers who were present at the meeting recounted one tense exchange. A worker rose from the floor demanding to know precisely when the contract would be sent out and how they could be expected to study it before voting began the following morning. Then, a union official blurted out in response, “You’ll f***ing get it today.”

“Their tone was really combative,” one worker said. “Something’s not right. They said, basically, ‘if you want to vote no, then go ahead and do it.’ They know something is going to happen before we know it.”

Meanwhile, Dana Inc. seems to be accepting the assurances of the UAW and USW that production will continue next week as scheduled. It was seen onboarding new workers on Wednesday afternoon at its plant in Warren, Michigan, where the company has been aggressively hiring people since the summer.

In a particularly provocative move designed to punish workers for voting against the contract, the company announced mandatory overtime during the upcoming Labor Day weekend at the Fort Wayne plant, including Labor Day itself.

The company would not do this if it did not have assurances from the unions that they were doing everything they could to prevent a strike, regardless of the outcome of the vote. Workers must be warned: A conspiracy is underway between the UAW and USW and management to defeat the opposition of workers. With this “no” vote, the UAW and USW will not go “back to the negotiating table.” They will hurry back to tell Dana Inc. what happened and ask how to resolve this unfortunate rebellion.

Workers have shown tremendous courage and determination over the course of the past week. But the unions cannot be pressured into negotiating anything better or calling a strike through a “no” vote, however necessary the rejection of the contract is as a first step. Workers must demand that the unions set an immediate strike deadline once the vote confirms that workers have rejected it. Every day the UAW and USW send workers back to work, they are effectively ordering workers to scab on themselves by helping the company stockpile products.

Workers understand that any strike would be left in

danger as long as it is controlled by the unions, which will do everything to isolate and starve workers out in order to impose virtually the same deal that they rejected. This is why the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee (DWRFC) has called on its Dana co-workers to begin now to organize a network of rank-and-file strike committees at every plant, comprised of rank-and-file autoworkers with no ties to the unions, to enforce their own control over the struggle.

One of the workers’ key demands must be the provision of strike pay equal to 100 percent of their normal wages. The unions cannot plead poverty. Between the UAW and the USW, they control \$2.7 billion in assets, equal to more than a third of the assets of Dana Inc. itself, a Fortune 500 company and multinational with 33,000 employees worldwide. This is money which belongs to the workers, paid for out of their own dues. This must be requisitioned in order to keep workers going in their struggle.

There is no time to delay. To contact the DWRFC about organizing a new leadership for the struggle at Dana, email them at danawrfc@gmail.com or text at (248) 602-0936.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact