

Former Dana auto parts worker fired after missing time due to COVID infection

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Workers at Dana Inc. are in a battle against hyper-exploitative and hostile conditions at plants spanning the United States. Workers at plants across the country have rejected, by massive margins, a concessions-laden contract negotiated by the United Auto Workers and United Steel Workers, which includes significant concessions on healthcare and wage increases below the rate of inflation. What has driven workers' anger most of all, however, is the brutal regime of speedup at the company, with workers forced to endure working for weeks at a time without even a single day off.

The round-the-clock work schedule enforced with the support of the unions has led to a spate of injuries, including the tragic death of Danny Walters, an epileptic who suffered a seizure while working at the company's plant in Dry Ridge, Kentucky. The UAW took no action, and management ordered workers to continue production after watching a co-worker convulse on the concrete floor.

However, this was not the only incident to occur at the Dry Ridge location. Steven Fletcher, a 38-year-old former Dana worker, says he was fired after missing time due to COVID.

"I worked on first shift," Steven told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "It was a nightmare. They would draft you every day. Sometimes I would have to start work at 2 a.m., but then they would switch you to the 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. [during the day]."

"I have two big scars, one on each palm of my hand, and two on each elbow to remind me that money isn't everything, especially not more important than my family. I have two little boys that Dana kept me from. One is 11 months old, and one is 3. Working for Dana kept me away for 84 hours a week, even more counting when I went home all I had the energy for was to sleep. I'm still recovering from my last surgery. Thankfully

I'm almost back at 100 percent and I can get back supporting my family.

"While working at Dana, there [were] other incidents that I saw and went through. Like one incident, the painting booth caught fire and was put out by management—there was a strong smell afterwards from the smoke. We were told to go back to the line within 20 minutes."

Eventually, Steven began experiencing COVID symptoms. Two rapid tests came back negative, but Steven still had to endure 20 days of unpaid quarantine. Upon return, however, Steven still felt ill. "One day I kept having to use the restroom and was physically drained. I ended up having to leave early and went to my family doctor, who conducted another COVID test. When the results came back from the lab it came back positive. I had to miss 14 days from that day of the results. Altogether it was 17 days, 3 of which waiting for results. For a combined total, with two negative results and one positive result, I missed a total of 37 days.

"I finally was able to get back to work in full swing and then I started having more health problems, only this time it was due to my hands, both right and left. I got an appointment to see my family doctor and told him what my symptoms [were] and he referred me to see a hand specialist. I was put on light duty restrictions."

However, Dana does not have any job classifications fitting the "light duty" requirements. "I was told by Human Resources that I pretty much [only] have the option to continue working the position that I was currently at. They said that's the best option I have because any other position was harder than the position I was currently working. I made the decision to stay at the current position.

“When I started working again, my condition worsened, and I had to make another appointment to be seen by [the] family doctor. He put me off until I saw a hand specialist. So, I spoke with HR and told him what my family doctor had told me and turned in my medical note. HR then told me that I can’t continue missing days like I have been and gave me a warning.”

Steven was told that if he missed any more days he would be fired. “I went back to work and made it a week and a half. But I couldn’t stand the pain I experienced while working my position that carried over at home. I would wake up in the middle of the night with my hands and wrist feeling like they were completely on fire and literally bring tears to my eyes.

“I finally got in to see a hand specialist who conducted a couple of tests, which came back to me having extreme cases of carpal tunnel in both my left and right hand.” Steven was also diagnosed with cubital tunnel syndrome, which can cause a pain or a tingling sensation in the elbow due to irritation or damage to the ulnar nerve.

“So, I contacted HR and relayed the results with documentation from the hand specialist. HR then informed me over the phone that I have been terminated from Dana. The reason HR gave me was my attendance and exceeded the days I was allowed to miss. I brought it to HR’s attention that I turned in all the documentation from my family doctor and hand specialist that preformed the surgeries.

“HR’s response to me was they didn’t have to accept doctor’s notes and that I’ll still have to miss a considerable amount of time. They said they will not put up with the amount of time that I had already missed and the amount of time I would have to miss for surgeries and recovery time. All of my health problems occurred because of Dana, and I was let go for what they caused.”

The UAW did not lift a finger to help Steven, he says. “The union steward that was on my shift told me not to worry about it, that he will take care of it, and call me in a day or two. But I never got the call.

“It’s sad the way people are treated by Dana,” Steven said. He also said he supports the newly formed Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which was founded to oppose the union-backed sellout contract and build support for Dana workers among other sections of the working class. “I think it’s a great idea

for workers to form a rank-and-file committee. It saddens me that when you think you have a union to have your back, and knowing that Dana was in the wrong, they did nothing to fight for me.”



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