

UAW calls bogus “strike” at ZF Marysville Axle, while forcing Dana workers to remain at work after rejecting contract

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The United Auto Workers called a token strike on Thursday at the Marysville Axle plant in Michigan, demanding that German parts maker ZF abide by the terms of a “neutrality agreement” allowing the union in the facility, which it has apparently since reneged on.

While the UAW claimed that 300 workers were involved in the strike, ZF claimed that no more than a dozen took part in the pickets and production continued normally on Thursday. A worker from the Marysville plant said he had heard nothing about a strike beforehand and reported seeing only a few pickets on his way in to work. Photos on social media also showed only a handful of people outside of the plant.

There are ample reasons for Marysville workers to fight. The plant has been jointly operated by ZF and Fiat Chrysler, now Stellantis, until the latter announced plans in 2019 to pull out by the end of 2021. When the pullout was announced, they faced demands for massive concessions to keep the plant operating under ZF's sole management.

Underscoring the bogus character of the stunt, the UAW made sure workers who are still employed by Stellantis at the plant stayed on the job during the “strike,” claiming they were bound by a no-strike clause in the contract.

There is enormous potential for Marysville workers to conduct a real fight and to unite in a common struggle with auto parts workers at Dana, some of whom work only three miles away at the plant in St. Clair. Dana workers have voted down, by massive margins, a national concessions contract put forward by the UAW and the United Steelworkers. The deal included givebacks on healthcare, raises below the rate of inflation, and the maintenance of a brutal regime of mandatory overtime in which workers labor for weeks at a time without a single day off. Among Dana workers, support for a strike is overwhelming.

However, the UAW and USW are forcing workers to remain on the job on a day-to-day contract extension after the vote, while keeping them isolated from both the workers at Marysville and from their brothers and sisters at other parts facilities and assembly plants.

The auto parts workers have formed the Dana Workers Rank-

and-File Committee to take control of their struggle and have issued an open letter to the UAW and USW demanding a September 13 strike deadline.

In a statement dripping with hypocrisy, UAW Region 1 director James Harris said, “It is unconscionable that [ZF] would choose to put workers through delay tactics and efforts to avoid the union when a majority of their employees have agreed to it.” Employing delay tactics and defying the will of the majority of the workforce, however, is exactly what the UAW and USW are doing at Dana.

The coverage that the UAW's ineffectual protests at Marysville garnered—reported immediately in the pro-business *Detroit News* and announced on the front page of the UAW's website—contrasts sharply with the total media silence from both the union and the corporate press of the struggle unfolding at Dana, which has been covered only by the *World Socialist Web Site*. This is exactly what happened earlier in the summer at Volvo Trucks in Virginia where workers organized a rank-and-file committee to defeat three consecutive sellout contracts by the UAW and waged a six-week strike, which went unacknowledged by the union and the press until the union began shutting it down.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the unions have no intention even of calling a toothless “Hollywood strike” at Dana—fearing this might get out of their control. Instead, the UAW is seeking to find a way to force through the agreement regardless of the vote. A day-to-day extension was announced to workers in an insulting one-sentence memo sent out to the locals. Meanwhile, under its veil of silence, UAW officials are seeking to identify and threaten militant workers on the shop floor. In at least one case, a UAW local official carried out an assault against a worker who had asked a critical question.

Among Marysville workers, as among Dana workers, there is ample distrust of the UAW after massive levels of corruption and pro-company sweetheart deals. The joint ownership of the Marysville plant was the product of an agreement, signed off on by the UAW, which allowed the facility to open in 2008 under an arrangement where the property and the workforce were leased by Chrysler to ZF. The deal was extended in 2010 and

again in 2012.

“We were badly mistreated by the UAW, and now we have found out that these top officials were involved in corruption,” said one former Marysville worker, who has since transferred to another plant. Approximately 200 second-tier Stellantis workers still remain at the facility, he said, because ZF is struggling to hire people with a strict work regime he described as “draconian” and a starting wage of only \$15.78 an hour. “They can't hire enough skilled people,” he said.

In 2019, Local 961 officials at Marysville filed a lawsuit against the International UAW and Fiat Chrysler to try and stop the offloading of the plant, pending the completion of the massive federal corruption probe, which brought down much of the union's top officials. Former UAW Vice President for Fiat Chrysler Norwood Jewell and others pleaded guilty to accepting millions of dollars in bribes over the course of several national contract negotiations, which one company executive said was to keep them “fat, dumb and happy.” Jewell's predecessor, General Holiefield, who signed off on the original Marysville deal, died before he could be convicted of taking bribes from FCA officials, including \$262,000 to pay off his mortgage.

Local 961 President Mike Booth also appeared as a witness at Jewell's sentencing hearing. “His actions have disenfranchised every member of UAW Local 961, but also future members,” Booth said.

The 2019 national contract at Fiat Chrysler, which ratified the company's pullout from Marysville in spite of a bogus “moratorium” on plant closures, was also met with fierce opposition from Marysville workers.

While Marysville workers want to fight poverty wages and “draconian” working conditions, the only issue for the UAW is ensuring that it is allowed by the company to remain in the plant under the terms of their neutrality agreement. There can be no doubt that it is prepared to throw workers under the bus to accomplish this.

A similar “neutrality” agreement has existed at Dana since 2003, and it is under this arrangement that the UAW obtained entry into the company's plants and a guarantee of dues income from workers. In exchange, the UAW agreed to a sweetheart deal, concluded behind the backs of workers, which gave the company a green light to impose whatever measures it wanted to keep labor costs down. As one lawyer summed up the deal in 2010, after it was upheld in a landmark National Labor Relations Board ruling: “The union promised that the health care provisions of the new CBA [Collective Bargaining Agreement] would not impede the company's cost-control measures, including premium sharing, increased deductibles, and increased out-of-pocket maximums. The union further agreed that the CBA would allow for mandatory overtime, and other employer-friendly concepts such as flexible compensation and team-based approaches to work.”

Under the neutrality agreement, which is still in force, the

union agreed not to say anything “negative, derogatory, or demeaning” about either the company or “management generally.”

A major factor behind Dana's support for the neutrality agreement was that UAW recognition would help them secure more contracts with the Big Three automakers General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, which all have the closest ties to the corporatist UAW. In 2003, the *Toledo Blade* wrote, “Analysts expect the UAW, during contract talks under way in Detroit, to demand more help unionizing industry suppliers in exchange for relaxation of plant closing and layoff sanctions won by union bargainers from auto manufacturers in 1999.”

It continued, “Sean McAlinden, a labor analyst with the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, told the *Blade* that Dana officials likely recognize that more and more Big Three business, especially at General Motors and Ford, will go to union suppliers after the current bargaining is concluded.”

“We're looking for a positive partnership with Dana,” said UAW President Ron Gettelfinger at the time. “Corporate officers at Dana have shown tremendous leadership in developing a proactive strategy that respects the rights of employees.” For the UAW, “respecting the rights of employees” means carrying out mass layoffs, plant closures and mandatory overtime through the official sanction of a collectively “bargained” contract.

The only way forward for both Dana and Marysville workers is through a joint struggle, in which workers leverage their independent strength in opposition to the betrayals of the UAW. The Dana Workers' Rank-and-File Committee was formed last month to coordinate this struggle on a national and international scale and build up support for Dana workers among their counterparts at other parts plants and at plants operated by the Big Three automakers.

To join this fight, workers from Dana, Marysville, or other companies should contact the DWRFC via email at danawrfc@gmail.com or by text at (248) 602-0936.



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