

Big Three autoworkers: Support the struggle of Dana parts workers! For a united movement against sweatshop conditions in the auto industry!

World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter
16 September 2021

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* calls on autoworkers at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis to come to the aid of their brothers and sisters at auto parts giant Dana Inc., in their struggle against both the Fortune 500 company and the United Auto Workers and United Steelworkers.

Workers at more than a dozen Dana plants throughout the Midwest and South voted down a sellout contract earlier this month by a more than nine-to-one margin. At the plants in Toledo, Ohio and Sterling, Illinois, workers voted unanimously against the deal. The contract would have provided for wage increases far below the rate of inflation, maintained the hated two-tier wage structure, included significant givebacks on health care and maintained the company's brutal system of mandatory overtime.

But the UAW and USW responded to the no vote with their usual tricks. They are keeping workers on the job on a day-to-day contract extension while deliberately dragging out talks as long as possible. Meanwhile, they are telling workers that they are refusing to raise any new demands at the "bargaining table," on the absurd grounds that it might anger the company into demanding more concessions.

But Dana workers have not caved in. They have set up the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which is democratically controlled by the workers themselves, to communicate and coordinate with each other and force a strike action. They are demanding real gains, including a 75 percent wage increase, the end of the two-tier wage system and other critical demands.

Sweatshops do not only exist in Mexico or India but in "union shops" right here in Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky

and Tennessee—and Dana is one of the sweatshop kings. The conditions which the unions have "negotiated" at this company recall the worst abuses of the 1800s, with workers forced to stay on the job, in many cases, for 12 hours a day for weeks at a time before getting a single day off.

Filthy, squalid conditions are the norm in Dana plants. Roofs leak when it rains, and floors are covered with puddles of oil which workers slip on. Machines produce airborne particles which workers breathe in each day—with unknown health consequences. Production does not stop on the line even in the case of serious injury. This happened in June, when a worker named Danny Walters suffered a seizure on the job at the plant in Dry Ridge, Kentucky, and died the next day. Meanwhile, COVID is spreading unabated in the plants, particularly in the eight facilities in Kentucky and Tennessee, states which are experiencing record surges.

Such is the seedy underbelly of the auto industry, which the unions have long treated as the "trash at labor's doorstep." But the conditions here affect the vital interests of every autoworker. The profits which GM, Ford and Stellantis make come not only from the sweat of workers in the assembly plants but in the slave-like exploitation of hundreds of thousands of parts workers who make the axles, drive shafts, seats, wheels, windshields, headlights and other critical parts.

As late as the 1980s, parts workers earned near-parity wages with their counterparts in assembly. But in order to cut costs, the UAW and the Big Three cooked up a deal to spin off parts production, previously handled mostly in-house by the automakers, into third-party contractors whose workers made poverty wages. The UAW enforced

this through its betrayal of a series of strikes in the 1980s, including the AP Parts strike in Toledo, against wage cutting and union busting.

This, in turn, was bound up with the transformation of the UAW and the other trade unions into well-heeled agents of management, bossed by bureaucrats whose six-figure incomes are dependent upon the union's incestuous financial relationships with management. Such was the case when the UAW signed a "neutrality agreement" at Dana in 2003, when the company allowed the union into their plants in exchange for a range of concessions on benefits and working hours, a deal worked out behind the backs of workers.

Now, once again, "near-parity" is being achieved across the country—by bringing assembly workers to the level of exploitation of parts workers. After decades of concessions, including the 2009 bankruptcy, which expanded the hated tier system, and the expansion of temporary part-time as a lower third tier in the aftermath of the 2015 agreement, new hires in the major assembly plants make barely more, and in some cases even less, than workers at Dana. For example, Dana workers in Warren, Michigan start out at \$17 per hour, while TPTs at General Motors plants earn only \$16.67.

The Big Three are also ramping up mandatory overtime during the pandemic, in order to make up for lost production. At Stellantis' Sterling Heights Assembly Plant (SHAP), even as it is cutting hundreds of jobs, management is invoking a clause in the contract to operate the plant on "critical status," allowing them to work people for seven days a week until the end of the year. Even skilled trades at the plant are working 84 hours per week, with one week off in between, since early in the year.

To top it off, massive COVID outbreaks in the assembly plants have been covered up systematically with the support of the union, which have likely led to dozens of deaths.

At Dana, the UAW is operating with a definite strategy. First, they are trying to buy themselves time to work out a "new" deal which is identical to the old in all basic aspects. Second, the union is seeking to bleed off workers' momentum after the rush of enthusiasm during the contract rejection and force them to keep working to stockpile parts, which the company can use against them in the case of a strike. It is also determined to keep production moving during the critical weeks of the changeover to next year's models.

Third, the UAW is enforcing a total information

blackout on workers to keep them from knowing the truth about their conspiracy with the company. And finally, they are resorting to brute force with a campaign of intimidation to physically disrupt workers' unity and cow them into silence.

But the UAW bureaucrats are acting from a position of weakness, not strength. Their desperate measures to hold Dana workers back are proportional to the desperate situation facing the auto giants, whose production has been decimated by the chip shortage. The Big Three have sought to partially counteract this shortage by prioritizing the operation of plants which produce the highest-margin vehicles. Many of these most profitable vehicles, however, have critical parts which are produced at Dana feeder plants. A nationwide strike at Dana would not only stagger the parts maker but cause whole portions of the auto industry to grind to a halt.

The UAW's strategy depends entirely upon the continued isolation of Dana workers by the union. It will collapse if Big Three workers come to their defense.

Workers at the major automakers, as well as workers at John Deere, whose contract expires next month, and workers in the "foreign" auto plants across the South and Midwest must begin building lines of communication and support with their brothers and sisters at Dana, who are fighting the same issues they all confront. Share statements of the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee as widely as possible with your coworkers. Establish contact with Dana workers, particularly at those plants which supply your own facilities. Discuss the situation at Dana with your coworkers and begin forming support committees at your own plant.

Take up the fight today! Contact the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee and begin organizing a united movement against sweatshop conditions. 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