

Deere workers support joint struggle with Dana auto parts workers

Marcus Day

20 September 2021

Support continues to grow within the auto industry for the struggle being waged by Dana auto parts workers against low wages, brutal overtime and sweatshop conditions.

Earlier this month, Dana workers voted down a concessions-laden contract proposal endorsed by the United Auto Workers (UAW) and United Steelworkers (USW) unions by roughly 90 percent. Dana is a Fortune 500 company that supplies the Big Three automakers, as well as John Deere, Caterpillar, and a number of other heavy equipment and vehicle manufacturers.

Since the vote, the UAW and USW have kept workers at Dana in the dark, stonewalling demands for strike action and keeping workers on the job on a day-to-day contract extension. They are also subjecting Dana workers to an information blackout, out of fear that news of their struggle could inspire support among other sections of the auto industry.

In opposition to the union's treachery, Dana workers have organized the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee (DWRFC). The DWRFC is disseminating information among the Dana plants across the country and fighting to demand an immediate end to the two-tier system, a 75 percent wage increase across the board, full health care for active workers and retirees and the restoration of the eight-hour day, along with serious measures to protect workers against COVID-19.

Even as it is pushing a concessions contract at Dana, the UAW is in closed-door talks with agricultural and heavy equipment giant Deere Inc. over a new six-year contract. The UAW provoked anger among Deere workers in 2015 when it pushed through the previous contract, claiming it had been ratified by a margin of fewer than 200 votes, prompting calls from workers for a recount. The deal maintained the hated tier system,

gave Deere a free hand to carry out repeated layoffs, and kept in place a grueling productivity "incentive" system, CIPP.

The UAW released a "summary" of Deere's initial contract offer at strike authorization votes earlier this month that amounted to a declaration of war, including drastic increases to workers' health care costs, below-inflation wage increases, along with an end to the plant closure moratorium and an end to overtime after eight hours.

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* has been campaigning among workers at the Big Three and Deere for support for Dana auto parts workers. A statement issued by the Autoworker Newsletter last week said, "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."

"I feel for the Dana workers," said a Deere worker at the company's Harvester Works in East Moline, Illinois. "It's what the big corporations are doing to all of us. The UAW is weak."

A veteran worker at Deere's Cylinder Division plant in Moline, Illinois, told the WSWS that she had not previously heard of Dana Corporation, or that workers there were involved with a contract dispute.

She had, however, heard about the weeks-long strike by Volvo Trucks workers earlier this year, and the rank-and-file committee they formed to fight against concessions pushed by the company and the UAW. "I saw that workers at Volvo had a rank-and-file committee," she said. It was good, she added, that the committee at Volvo was able "to get some knowledge

on what's going on, 'cause the union was keeping it all going without telling them anything."

When told that Dana workers were demanding an end to the tier system and the restoration of the eight-hour day, she responded, "Absolutely. And they should demand a raise. And don't let them cut your health care."

"I've been with this company for more than 20 years. When I hired on, I hired on under the old contract, then the new contract came, and anyone that was hired after 1997, they lost their pension, and they screwed them on their shift premiums, among other things. In the following contracts, I never got a raise.

"Then after all that time, in the contract offer they just released they offer us an 80 cent raise? That's a slap in the face."

In addition to wage increases below the rate of inflation, she said, "They want to increase the premiums on our medical. They struck COLA [cost-of-living raises], after they froze COLA in the last contract. They want to eliminate the ban on closing all of our shops, and no more overtime over eight hours."

Deere is also trying to keep workers from speaking out on the conditions they face. "They sent an email recently, a reminder of the company's policy where you can't talk to the media. They don't want the public, our next-door neighbor to know what they're doing. It makes me sick."

Another Deere worker in the Quad Cities told the *WSWS Autoworker Newsletter*: "I would like to extend my solidarity with Dana workers and hope they remember to have solidarity for those workers out there struggling right now without any representation, who are often looked down upon as low-skill, replaceable labor. If we can't stand up for them, we have no hope to better ourselves."

The *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter* is assisting workers at Deere, Dana, Volvo, and in the auto industry in organizing rank-and-file committees, independent of the pro-corporate UAW. Such committees are needed to enable workers to share information across the plants, linking up their efforts and formulating demands based on their common interests, including an end to the tier system, the restoration of the eight-hour day, fully paid for health care and pensions, and substantial raises.



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