

Dana Fort Wayne workers take unanimous vote demanding strike action at meeting over objections of USW officials

George Kirby
26 September 2021

Anger at the lack of information and evident stalling by the United Steelworkers over continuing contract negotiations with Dana Corporation boiled over at a union meeting Saturday attended by workers from the company's Fort Wayne, Indiana plant.

The early Saturday morning meeting was a regular monthly meeting, normally sparsely attended, but with workers having massively rejecting the recent sellout deal brought back by USW, fifty workers turned out, demanding information on the contract struggle. Workers' ire was particularly raised by the announcement last Tuesday that the USW and United Autoworkers (UAW) were not meeting with the company until October 7.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted at the time, the dragging out of negotiations takes place under conditions where Dana is preparing to modify its production for 2022 vehicle models for the Detroit automakers. By extending talks and refusing to set a strike date, the USW and UAW are deliberately giving up the leverage workers have at this critical time.

At the meeting, Dana Fort Wayne workers denounced the contract extension granted management by the USW and demanded the holding of a strike vote. Jeff Gleason, a United Steelworkers District 7 Representative making over \$130,000, provided excuses to workers of why they could not have a strike vote. "The strike vote won't mean anything since International [USW] is pulling all the shots... The company doesn't need this."

After a heated confrontation with union officials, workers present at the meeting called for a strike authorization vote from the floor that passed by a reported 50-to-0 margin. According to reports from

workers who attended the meeting, the USW committeemen refused to announce that a strike authorization vote was being taken.

At the meeting, workers angrily rejected claims by the USW officials that the negotiations had to be delayed due to the difficulty in securing hotel bookings. One said, "There's the internet to have these meetings!" Gleason created an uproar when he implied that Dana workers needed to help management compete against rival parts supplier American Axle.

Workers said that having workers continuing to report to work without a new contract in place was only helping the company, in effect forcing workers to scab against themselves.

Gleason ignored oppressive attendance policies and other vital issues such as healthcare coverage and the tier system. Dana Fort Wayne workers told the WSWS that wages have always been an issue, with checks being repeatedly shorted by the payroll department. Meanwhile, Gleason again offered only empty assurances to the roughly 109 workers, going back to 2017, who were promised raises but have still received nothing, despite repeated promises from the USW.

One worker condemned the USW over its acceptance of the first sellout contract followed by the contract extension. "They [the union] are legally pushing the limit against workers. We took concessions in 2007 [during bankruptcy]. Now the company is again making money in the pandemic and we're giving concessions again."

The majority of the workers at the plant did not know of the meeting. Out of the 50 workers present at the meeting, at least ten workers had to leave to finish their shift after the vote. One worker said he saw the

remainder of the meeting as a “waste of time,” due to the refusal of the union to recognize the strike vote. The workers who did not attend only heard about the meeting through word of mouth or through the WSWS.

“I know there was a meeting this [Saturday] morning at 8. I wasn’t able to make it,” said a worker. She continued, describing her frustration with the union, “I’m upset that’s something we’re supposed to be informed about and made part of.”

According to another worker, the union said, “This was the best they could get. I don’t think anyone was happy. It’s just a shame that you leave a membership meeting mad, you can’t trust your own union. Seems to me laws are being broken; they are paid to represent us.”

Dana workers must not allow the backroom deals of the USW and UAW to continue. Fort Wayne with other plants voted over 90 percent against a sweatshop contract. The refusal of the union at Fort Wayne to take a strike authorization vote almost a month after the contract rejection is a deliberate act of sabotage that demonstrates the determination of the USW to block any genuine struggle.

Dana workers are in a very powerful position but must take the power of the struggle out of the hands of the USW and UAW. This means expanding the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee in each plant to share information and democratic discussion of action, with Dana workers at each of these plants electing trusted representatives for a national strike committee to take their struggle forward.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact