

Kentucky Dana worker demands paid time off for COVID-19 and fair lunch breaks

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The *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke with a Dana auto parts worker in Kentucky about conditions at his plant, where workers are routinely denied the right to an adequate lunch break and given no paid time off even if they test positive for COVID-19. The previous contract expired six weeks ago, but the trade unions that “represent” Dana workers—the UAW and USW—have forced workers to keep working to produce parts, with no regard for workers’ health and safety.

The Kentucky Dana worker asked to use a pseudonym and will be referred to as “Pat.”

WSWS: Can you tell us your thoughts about the UAW and USW’s claim that they are entering into “negotiations” with the company again?

Pat: This doesn’t sit well. The UAW is dragging this out. This becomes a cycle, where we have lots of overtime and people eventually leave. The company views us as replaceable. People are mad because they did not price the labor market. Some places near us are hiring at \$21/hour, and at Dana they offer \$17-19. A lot of people took it as an insult.

WSWS: What is the COVID-19 situation like at your plant?

Pat: A lot of people have had COVID or are scared to miss time off from work. That’s because the company doesn’t offer paid time off. They say, “File unemployment.” There have been times when there have been a lot of positive cases in the plant. It’s a weekly factor, it’s always changing. It never disappears. Hospitals are overwhelmed here, I’ve heard. Just think—this Fortune 500 company offers no paid sick time for COVID! They refer you to unemployment. Seriously, what the hell! Here’s the thing. If you’re a single mother with kiddos, living paycheck to paycheck, if you get sick, then you might not get paid for two weeks.

WSWS: They send you to unemployment, and then what are you supposed to do?

Pat: One coworker told me that they were so sick that they just gave up trying for the unemployment, because COVID was so bad. I mean, if you have COVID really bad, you’re not going to bother with unemployment. I had one person tell me they were so sick they said “the heck with it” because they felt so sick. You’re going to deal with more bullshit to get a week’s payment. Some people were out for three weeks. The moral of the story is that if you get COVID really bad, do you want to deal with unemployment headaches that you might not qualify for?

WSWS: How long do you get for lunch?

Pat: They give us only 10-minute breaks and a 20-minute lunch break. By the time you get to the lunchroom and get in line to cook your food, 5 minutes have gone by. It’s ridiculous. I asked for longer breaks, and the union said they shot it down. Someone should look into whether the Department of Labor says we get a half hour for lunch breaks. We don’t get that long. There are not enough microwaves. So, you walk across the building and go get your lunch. Everyone is in line for a microwave. The clock is ticking. You buy a few items from the vending machine, wash your hands and sit your butt down. Fifteen minutes have gone by.

WSWS: What has the UAW done about it?

Pat: I talked to the UAW, and they said they are not going to revisit lunch breaks in this contract.

WSWS: Is this rule enforced fairly?

Pat: No, some workers don’t get in trouble for taking double time on lunches. No one understands it. It’s the same thing with cell phone use. There is huge favoritism. I guess it depends on who you are if you get in trouble or not.

WSWS: Did you hear about the UAW and Dana

working to fire Keaira Marsenburg, a worker at the Dana plant in Toledo, Ohio? This is a worker who spoke up to defend herself and coworkers. She was framed up and fired with the help of the UAW.

Pat: I am not surprised. They try to put a target on your back. I will keep her in my prayers.

WSWS: Do you have any words for your fellow Dana workers at other plants, or for auto workers at the Big Three and around the world?

Pat: The employees have all the power these days. These companies probably want to get the 2022 models out. People are NOT replaceable. The working class figured this out, and we are fighting back now.

WSWS: What do you and your coworkers think about the *Autoworker Newsletter* ?

Pat: I'll read your stuff and pass it on to my coworkers. It's getting passed around like candy. People discuss it daily. You've got a lot of people talking. I'll keep reading, we will all keep reading. You are very popular at my plant. The UAW will try to shut you guys down. They hate the online stuff. We all wait patiently for the next article. You have the majority here, I do know that.



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