

“This is place is like a jail or a prison. I’ve never been to jail or prison but I’ll tell you what, if it’s anything like this place I don’t ever want to go.”

Worker crushed in forklift accident at Dana Toledo plant amid COVID outbreak

Kathleen Martin
28 September 2021

Several days after Keaira Marsenburg came forward with the story of her victimization with the collusion of the United Auto Workers union, workers at Dana’s Toledo Driveline plant are coming forward to describe horrific working conditions inside the plant.

“This place is like a jail or a prison. I’ve never been to jail or prison but I’ll tell you what, if it’s anything like this place I don’t ever want to go,” one worker said.

The details from Toledo are emerging as “negotiations” are believed to have been restarted this week between the UAW, the United Steelworkers and Dana. Although a USW memo at the Dana plant in Fort Wayne, Indiana claimed that talks over local contracts at UAW plants were to have begun Monday and continue through Friday, the UAW has not issued any public statement confirming this. Workers at the plant in St. Clair, Michigan reported Monday that UAW bargaining committee members were still in their plant, having not left for any talks.

This only underscores that what is taking place, under cover of a total information blackout, are not “negotiations” between two adversarial parties, but strategy sessions between Dana management and the pro-company unions. Their aim is to formulate a plan to ram through a sellout deal which was rejected by Dana workers earlier this month by a 90 percent margin, and to drag out the talks long enough to buy Dana time to complete the model year changeover, when the Dana workers’ position is at its most powerful.

This shows the need for workers to take the initiative into their own hands by building the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee (DWRFC) to share information, discuss their own strategy to defeat the union-backed sellout and to build lines of support and communication with workers across the country and the world. To join the DWRFC, email

them at danawrfc@gmail.com or text to (248) 602-0936?.

Worker injured in forklift accident

On September 27, a worker on first shift at the Dana Toledo Driveline plant was severely injured when a forklift accidentally ran him over, crushing his foot. The worker, an older male who has not yet been publicly identified, was reportedly rushed to the hospital and may have had a portion of his leg amputated.

“They’re making these forklift drivers do way too much, way more than what they’re supposed to be doing, and it’s just dangerous,” a worker said. “They’re trying to stockpile so much stuff in case of a strike that there’s literally no room to even walk in there.

“They want you moving quick. And when you’re moving quick like that, there’s no time for errors. I had a guy almost hit me because there’s no horn, no nothing. He was in a hurry because he was behind. Where there should be two forklifts there’s only one, and if you get backed up they write you up. They got that point system in here and it’s just a joke. It’s one of the main reasons Dana has such a high turnover rate.”

“It’s so unorganized,” another Dana worker told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. “I feel for the driver, too. Forklift drivers have it really hard in that plant. They are constantly changing the schedule, always running out of parts, and the drivers end up having to hurry to keep the line going. It’s too cramped in there and stuff like this is bound to happen when there’s no protocol in

place.”

Another worker reported that Sunday night, just before the forklift accident, a worker on third shift sustained a severe head wound on the line and had to go to the hospital to get stitches.

COVID outbreak

Workers are also reporting a major surge in COVID-positive cases in the plant, which are not officially tracked or reported by the UAW or Dana, Inc. There are no running tallies of positive COVID-19 cases, and the only way that workers are able to find out about whether they have been near a sick person is through direct contact with each other.

“I don’t know what’s going on, but apparently an entire line was out recently because everyone is sick with COVID,” one worker said.

“Dana knows people are getting sick, but they’re hushing it up to keep us on that line,” another said. According to workers, a supervisor who was COVID-positive continued to report to work without getting tested in spite of having symptoms, almost certainly infecting other employees. The worker said, “What I don’t understand is, supervisors are salaried employees, so there’s no reason for them to be at work [if they are sick]. This supervisor was wearing a mask but it was all pulled down past their chin so it wasn’t even doing anything. I had to stop and think to myself, ‘Are they trying to get us sick? Is this person purposely trying to infect me?’”

Another worker said, “A supervisor came into work super sick, gasping for air, and tried to say he just had bronchitis. He wasn’t worried about COVID because he had his shots. But my wife had her shots and she still got it, so he’s missing the point. It’s everywhere in that plant. On every shift there’s probably 50-60 people who have it, or are calling in because they’re sick. Or, their points are up so they’re coming in because once you have six points you’re out the door.

“The supervisor just sat there and told everybody, ‘Well, you wouldn’t have to worry about it if you would have just got your shots.’ But then even he himself tested positive for it. He said he didn’t stay home because, ‘What’s the matter with America is that it’s too easy for people to call off work.’”

Threats and intimidation, no union protection

One worker said the plant lacks basic safety protocol and that workers who speak up are threatened for their jobs. “If you say something they tell you, ‘Shut up or you’ll be written up.’ They’re very aggressive. Just yesterday a worker got accused of being drunk on the job, basically because one of the supervisors had it out for him. Called him off the machine in front of everybody, and come to find out—he wasn’t even drunk! It was just because they got into an argument and they were trying to get him fired. It was terrible.”

“It’s very prejudiced here. I’m not surprised that young lady lost her job,” he said, referring to Keaira Marsenburg. “When they got it out for you, man, they’re gonna get you. And as soon as you start talking about the union or the contract they will do whatever they can to get you out the door.”

He explained that many new employees are deliberately misinformed by the company about their rights in the plant, and that the UAW does nothing to fight for the workers.

“A lot of people are brand new and don’t know the rules, so people were coming to me because my whole family is union, so I know the rules. I had advised one of my coworkers not to talk to the supervisor about something without a union rep present. Next day they came to me and said, ‘Next time you cause an outburst like that we’re gonna write you up. You don’t speak about the union on company property.’ And I said what do you mean, outburst? And I’m paying union dues, even though I haven’t even had a union rep on our shift for like four months now.

“Then they’re telling the new people they can’t vote, even though they can, and they say if you wanna talk about the union you talk about it on your own time at home.”

“We were excited when ... I got hired at Dana. We thought things would finally start looking up for us. And come to find out, that’s not the way it works at all here. I left a decent job because I was promised the world, they promised me \$40 an hour here, but I maxed out at \$17.30.

He stressed the need for workers to get involved in building the Dana Workers’ Rank-and-File Committee. “I’ve wanted a rank-and-file committee here at Toledo. This place cannot treat people like this and keep getting away with it. And the union does nothing for you. So why even pay them?”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact