

Local union memo reveals United Steelworkers plan to expand mandatory overtime at Dana Fort Wayne

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A United Steelworkers (USW) memo obtained by the *World Socialist Web Site* shows that the union is planning on imposing a concessionary deal on Dana workers as local talks between the USW in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Dana Inc. management resumed Monday.

Since the expiration of the national agreement between the USW, the United Auto Workers and Dana management six weeks ago, the unions have kept workers on the job and refused to set a strike deadline for about 3,500 workers, after the 9-1 rank-and-file rejection of the sellout contract which the unions put to a vote last month. Meanwhile, Dana workers continue to face forced overtime, as the company stockpiles critical parts for the auto industry.

According to a document published by the bargaining committee for USW Local 903 at the Fort Wayne Dana plant and leaked to workers, the union is proposing that the number of Saturdays which management can mandate overtime be increased from the current 12 to 24 per year. Six Sundays per year will also be mandatory.

The exposure of this major concession by the USW ahead of the scheduled October 7 restart of global talks between the UAW/USW and Dana gives a taste of what to expect in any new agreement hatched by the union bureaucracy. The UAW/USW already targeted October 10 as the date for the conclusion of the talks, demonstrating that the outcome of the “talks” was already decided well in advance.

Workers at the Fort Wayne plant reacted in anger to the proposed concessions by the local bargaining committee. Excessive, in fact, virtually unlimited, mandatory weekend work is a major issue at all Dana factories.

Even though the current limit is 12 mandatory Saturdays, the USW allows the misuse of contract language permitting weekend work due to a plant’s “critical status” to enforce consecutive 7-day work schedules stretching for months at a time.

One of the ways which Dana, with the collusion of the unions, gets around contractual language on overtime is by declaring that overtime is necessary to meet the company’s obligations to its customers. Management, however, has expanded the term “customer” to mean other divisions and facilities within Dana itself, essentially writing itself a blank check for unlimited overtime.

Despite an overwhelming vote by Dana workers at Fort Wayne and other plants in the US to reject the company’s last contract proposal, USW Local 903 has refused to schedule an official strike vote. At the Local 903 monthly meeting on September 25 workers took a strike vote from the floor after local officials refused to entertain a motion to hold a strike. The motion for strike action passed unanimously.

A Dana worker from Fort Wayne who had seen the bargaining memo told the *World Socialist Web Site* that workers were outraged that the USW would raise the number of mandated Saturdays to 24.

“Everyone is opposed to it. The language of the contract has been abused. They have mandated every weekend for over 4 years. Sundays and holidays were supposed to be for ‘critical’ Big 3 shutdowns. They have abused the language without any resistance from the union.

“We make gears and heat treat them and then we take the cases and make them ready for the bearing caps, and they go to Dry Ridge, Kentucky. ... They say that

[Dry Ridge] is now our customer. The language of the contract doesn't define internal/external, but I have seen a letter from the personnel manager to the president of our union, he considers everyone an external customer. That was not the intent of the language."

He added, "They want a 5-year contract. Everyone here wants a 3-year contract. Our reps on the national level are not giving us information. I don't like that. Their purpose seems to be to defeat us. I have never seen anything like it."

With the annual model changeover approaching at the major carmakers and major supply chain disruptions, Dana workers are in a powerful position to strike. However, strike action is being blocked by the USW/UAW, who are enforcing a brutal work regime to keep parts flowing to the Detroit auto companies.

The Fort Wayne worker said, "We do heavy duty truck axles; the market is strong. We are in a great position. In 2008 we took concessions with the understanding when things got better, they would come back to us.

"They are taking from us, not giving. The contract we turned down was a junk contract.

"We are in a great position, but I don't think our union wants us to go on strike. The steelworkers did not even do a strike vote before negotiations. What kind of message does that send?"

He noted that in the last 10 years, the USW at Fort Wayne had not taken a single grievance to arbitration. "There should be multiple arbitrations a year," he said. "That tells me no representation is going on."

Workers face oppressive conditions in the Dana plants, reinforced with the active collaboration of the unions. They find that they are not eligible for paid sick time even from COVID-19. Instead, they must file for unemployment compensation, which only replaces a fraction of lost wages. This only encourages workers to report to work sick and infect others.

Meanwhile, the endless overtime leads to accidents. On September 27 a worker at the Dana Toledo Driveline plant was severely injured in an accident involving a forklift. The worker reportedly had his foot crushed and was rushed to the hospital. Just prior to that another worker had to go to the hospital to receive stitches after suffering a head gash.

The accident follows the September 16 firing of Dana

Toledo worker Keaira Marsenburg, who was victimized with the collaboration of the UAW. Her own union steward provided information to management to help get her fired. She was also removed without cause from the local UAW Facebook page.

The victimization of Marsenburg has called forth an outpouring of opposition from Dana workers and autoworkers more broadly. Workers see this attack as an effort to intimidate and silence opposition as the UAW/USW seek to ram through yet another sellout agreement that will maintain conditions of virtual industrial slavery at Dana and at other parts plants. The fight to defend Marsenburg, a well known militant at the Dana Toledo plant, must be linked to a broader fight to defeat the company/management dictatorship at Dana.

As Dana workers are battling the use of "critical plant" status to impose unlimited overtime, workers at the Stellantis Sterling Heights Assembly Plant outside Detroit face the same issue, with management dictating continuous, 7-day, 24-hour production at the facility through December 24. The plant builds the company's highly profitable Dodge Ram light trucks.

Earlier this year Stellantis, with the collaboration of the UAW, imposed a 12-hour, 7-day schedule on skilled trades workers, using obscure contract language related to alternative work schedules included in the 2019 national contract.

The *World Socialist Web Site* encourages Dana workers to get involved, join and help build a rank-and-file committee at your plant.



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