

# US unions ignore workers' demands during negotiations with auto parts maker Dana

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8 October 2021

Seven weeks have passed since the expiration of the contract between Dana Inc., the United Auto Workers (UAW) and United Steelworkers (USW) unions. Despite the fact that the initial tentative agreement was rejected by over 90 percent nationwide, the UAW and USW have accepted the company's demand to continue working, essentially forcing workers to scab against themselves by allowing Dana to stockpile parts.

Even after workers voted for strike authorization, unanimously in some cases, the unions have downplayed any talk of strike action. While the USW and UAW claim they are meeting to "renegotiate" the contract, leaked reports from workers express the true character of the negotiations.

Meanwhile, over the last week the USW and UAW have been meeting to discuss the global and local agreements with Dana. Workers at various Dana plants provided the *World Socialist Web Site* updates they received from officials present at the negotiations. One UAW official was quoted as remarking, "I don't think they [workers] will buy this."

A leaked USW proposal document revealed some of the union leadership's proposals to Dana, increasing Saturday mandates from 12 (the current limit) to 24 including six Sundays per year. USW officials sought to dismiss the significance of a recent strike authorization vote taken by workers at the Dana plant in Fort Wayne, Indiana, citing a 2007 document that they say shows the vote was in violation of protocols and therefore invalid.

A Dana worker from Warren, Michigan said of the negotiations, "We are hearing nothing at all. No updates from the union. Absolutely nothing." While the 3,500 workers are working continuously without a contract, union reps in meetings in Lexington, Kentucky are staying in hotel rooms paid by Dana. As

of this writing, the discussions have been mainly based on "local issues." One concession given to Dana by the USW was to allow weekend work mandate announcements to be pushed forward to Friday by end of shift, unlike the current clause where workers must be notified Thursday evening.

Dana was reportedly "dragging their feet," not making any concessions to workers' demands. Prior to the negotiations, union reps in some locals avoided discussion on demands raised by members, including in regards to back pay owed to workers under terms of the previous contract.

The questions of mandates including safety were not discussed. Working seven days a week, stockpiling parts, with risk of injury and COVID infection daily, workers voiced frustration over the contract negotiations. A production worker from Fort Wayne said, "We aren't hearing anything about the contract. My guys work hard—but they need money too. They need benefits. We put the hours in and don't get anything. We don't know what we're getting with the contract."

The worker continued, "The USW is no good at all. They just do what they do. Why do we even have them? They don't fight, they are quick to give in." He continued, "I want to strike, we never get two days in a row off. There is no way we should be doing what we are doing, 10-hour days, seven days a week. We're burnt out. One guy in there hasn't had a day off in 6 weeks. Accidents happen all the time, such as the lady who got her finger cut off; management had a meeting where they tried to play it off like it was her fault. Everyone is only a few steps away from hurting themselves."

Injuries and infections are common at Dana. In September a worker at the Dana Toledo Driveline plant

was injured when a forklift crushed his foot. At Dana Fort Wayne, a worker handling parts inside a robot cage stepped on a loose controller cord fell and slammed her head twice. Outbreaks of COVID-19 have continued while management, supervisors, and the unions keep workers in the dark.

“That’s the general idea [union stalling] with the current situation,” another Fort Wayne worker stated. “It’s a shy\*t show. They are just mandating constantly for literally nothing more than to stockpile.”

In an attempt to mollify workers, USW directors John Doust and Mike Millsap, who make well over \$130,000 a year, repositioned one particularly despised official, Jeff Gleason, out of negotiations. As one worker put it, this was “to give an appearance of order.”

Dana workers around the country are not only confronting a ruthless corporate management but the straitjacket of the USW and UAW. At the same time, the growing global supply train problems and concerns over component shortages put Dana workers as well as auto parts workers internationally in a powerful position. Workers must take the situation into their own hands independent of the pro-company trade unions by building rank-and-file-committees.

These rank-and-file committees will fight for workers’ demands, including the eight-hour day, real increases in wages and control over COVID-19 safety and enforcing shutdowns to protect the lives of workers. These committees will reach out and coordinate with workers at John Deere, the auto companies and other workers coming into struggle in the US internationally. For more information contact the Autoworker Newsletter.



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