

Released Fort Wayne Dana-USW “highlights” reveal another sellout to workers

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The United Steelworkers union (USW) released the second tentative agreement (TA) “highlights” to workers at auto parts maker Dana Inc.’s Fort Wayne plant Tuesday afternoon. The highlights present no fundamental change from the previous TA, which Fort Wayne workers rejected by 90 percent a month and a half ago, making clear that the new deal is yet another sellout cooked up by the USW and the United Auto Workers.

As of this writing, announcements were made at other Dana plants, but only the Fort Wayne workers have received highlights. In order to divide up and isolate different sections of the Dana workforce from each other, critical issues such as wage progression and overtime are handled at the local level, not in the global agreement covering all plants. It is therefore likely that other plants will receive TAs which are different, and in some cases worse, than the one at Fort Wayne. Regardless, the local agreement shows what workers at other plants can expect.

Opposition is already building to the deal. A senior worker said, “It’s junk. I’ve already started my ‘just vote no’ campaign. So far, all the Tier 2 people don’t like it. They say they will vote no.” One Tier 2 production worker agreed, “Yeah, they handed out our pamphlets today about the major points of the new contract. A bunch of BS, pretty much exactly what it says in your article is exactly what my paper says.”

Under the new TA, second-tier production workers will receive a \$3,000 ratification bonus, an initial pay increase upon ratification of between \$1.00 and \$2.50, depending on seniority, and \$0.50 yearly increases until their wages top out at \$22.50 on or before the fifth and final year of the contract. Skilled trades will receive a ratification bonus, \$1.25 increase in years 1 and 3, with a \$2,000 bonus in intervening years.

The previous TA would have had second-tier workers topping out at \$22 per hour, meaning the top of the wage scale has increased by a mere 50 cents. This shows the little difference between the first and second tentative agreements.

These wage increases will be virtually eaten up by

inflation, which currently stands at about 5 percent. However, the official inflation rate does not fully express the growing squeeze on workers’ income by the rising cost of living. Household rent, for example, rose 10.3 percent for the average family between July 2020 and July 2021.

Assuming the current 5 percent inflation rate stays constant over the life of the contract, the top pay of \$22.50 would be worth only \$17 in today’s dollars by the end of the contract in 2026. This means that all second-tier workers with three or more years of seniority will actually see a cut in their real wages over the course of the contract.

The company and the union are using a definite two-pronged strategy. First, they are using an increased signing bonus and a front-loaded wage progression for new hires to lure younger workers, in particular, into signing the contract. These mediocre wage increases will then be clawed back through inflation over the life of the contract. Second, they are attempting to split younger workers, whose wage increases will barely outpace inflation, from older workers, who will see a decrease in their real wages.

The USW has scheduled a ratification meeting at Fort Wayne for Sunday morning, with voting scheduled next Saturday inside the plant. Undoubtedly, at the meeting, the union will attempt to sell the new wage progression and the \$3,000 bonus as representing “substantial gains.” Even taking these lying claims at face value, the union is caught up in a contradiction.

The union earlier claimed, when it was attempting to browbeat workers into accepting the first TA, that no more money was on the table and that a rejection would only result in a contract which was even worse. The only conclusion which can be drawn is that the USW was either lying to workers then, or it will be lying to workers now. In reality, it is a combination of both.

In fact, there is more than enough money available to meet Dana workers’ demands. While workers continue to work through the injuries and the spread of COVID-19, the company continues to make hundreds of millions of dollars. Dana Inc. CEO James Kamsickas takes home a salary of

more than \$10 million. The top union negotiators, UAW Vice President Cindy Estrada and USW District 7 Director Mike Millsap made \$220,506 and \$153,498 in 2020, respectively, salaries which would put them in the higher echelons of Dana management.

The new TA also continues the regime of virtually limitless overtime, which has kept workers on the job for weeks at a time without a single day off. It is not yet known whether the final TA includes the proposal by the USW, reported two weeks ago by the *World Socialist Web Site*, to double the number of mandated overtime Saturdays from 12 to 24 per year and increase mandated Sundays to six per year. However, new language in the contract would require people to work for three consecutive Saturdays in order to earn an 8-hour “mandate credit,” which presumably could be exchanged for time off during a future mandated Saturday.

The language on mandates in the contract is not worth the paper it is printed on because the company routinely ignores contractual restrictions, with the acceptance of the union, without limits. It is not uncommon for Fort Wayne workers to work 30 days in a row or more. The company justifies this practice by citing the need to fulfill orders for “customers,” a term which management redefines to include other Dana facilities.

Moreover, the new deal fills in a loophole which workers have used to avoid working mandatory weekends by taking off on the Friday when mandates are announced. Under new language, they can now be mandated within the first four hours of the next day’s shift.

The contract gives workers only a single week of vacation each year, in addition to three “emergency” days. The information packet generously proclaims that vacation time can be used in single-day increments.

“They didn’t say anything about the overtime mandates that’s in our favor,” one Tier 2 worker said. “In fact, they are making it worse for us, not better. For example, they are making it so that if you are not here on the day that a supervisor mandates for the weekend, then they can mandate you within the first four hours of your next shift.”

While details which are currently available vaguely promise that no employees will be forced onto an Alternative Work Schedule (AWS), which eliminates overtime after 8 hours, workers are skeptical that this will not take place. AWS has been pushed inside the plant for years, one worker said. “Now they’re pushing it in other departments. They are trying to push 12-plus hours, 3 days off and 3 days on.”

One Fort Wayne worker told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the USW is already attempting to frighten workers into voting for the deal by threatening the loss of their jobs. “We

have the union committee people telling some of the new hires that if we don’t accept this contract, Dana is leaving town. Isn’t that a ‘scare tactic?’” he asked.

The USW and the UAW are also attempting to divide workers along jurisdictional lines. A worker from the Warren, Michigan plant said, “The UAW told [us] that if the USW was to go on strike, that Warren workers would not.”

Dana workers cannot leave this contract struggle in the hands of the USW and the UAW. Workers are in a powerful position, given the fact that they occupy a critical chokepoint in the highly strained auto supply chain, and they would be joining the largest strike movement in 40 years in the United States which includes 10,000 John Deere workers and thousands of health care workers. Moreover, this is part of an international strike wave, which includes strikes by auto workers in Brazil and Turkey, and a stoppage by more than 150,000 metalworkers striking in South Africa, which has crippled the largest auto industry in Africa.

Marcia Walters, widow of Dana worker Danny Walters who died after suffering a seizure on the job in June, issued a powerful statement of solidarity to Dana workers on Facebook. “Please demand the opportunity to read the entire contract. Don’t settle for less than you deserve,” she said. “I know it’s hard to fight back when you are tired and get little time to rest. If I could go back and change the past, I would have told my husband to quit and find a job where they RESPECT the health and family lives of ALL employees, not just management. The money means nothing if you lose your life, or your body breaks down from lack of rest. Educate your coworkers if you are strong enough. Much hope for a better tomorrow for all of you!!!”

Dana workers must reject the new TA. Moreover, they must build rank-and-file committees in each plant to demand the release of all contract documents and adequate time to study it before the vote, and that workers oversee the voting to prevent ballot stuffing by the union.



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