

Opposition to USW and UAW tentative agreement at Dana grows as details leak of new alternative work schedule

Representatives of rank-and-file committees from Dana, Deere and Volvo Trucks meet to discuss strategy

George Kirby
21 October 2021

The day after highlights of the local agreement at auto parts maker Dana's Fort Wayne plant were released, workers at additional plants are receiving highlights of the second tentative agreement (TA) between the company and the United Auto Workers (UAW) and United Steelworkers (USW) unions. By Wednesday night, workers from Dana plants in Warren, Michigan, Pottstown, Pennsylvania and Louisville, Kentucky received the highlights for their local agreements.

The details emerging at other plants confirm that, after making workers wait for over a month after they rejected the previous deal by a 9-to-1 margin, the USW and UAW are attempting to force through another sellout contract. Even though they have yet to release copies of the full contract, and there is no guarantee that they will before the vote, the USW and UAW have scheduled the ratification votes from Saturday through next Wednesday.

Following the pattern set at Fort Wayne, pay scales released for the four plants top out at \$22.50 in June 2026, four and a half years from now, and workers will receive a \$3000 lump sum ratification bonus. Skilled trades will receive a ratification bonus, \$1.25 increase in years 1 and 3, with a \$2,000 bonus in intervening years.

One worker wrote to the *World Socialist Web Site*: "we need to DEMAND a strike deadline – 10/26 12:00am [after voting at the last plants are scheduled to conclude]!"

Workers must take the struggle of the contract out of the hands of the union. Inflation currently is at 5.5 percent, which makes this TA a significant wage cut. There has been no change to line speed, safety issues, nor the COVID-19 policies of Dana. Even more revealing is the unions' disregard to life, while workers continue work in dangerous conditions.

Meanwhile, as workers continue to labor for seven days a week inside the plants, COVID-19 continues to spread. Workers from Fort Wayne reported that over the last 10 days, at least four skilled trades workers have tested positive for

COVID-19. Rather than informing workers around the plant, human resources and the union hid the details of the infection. In the union executive board meeting Monday, neither grievances nor the number of outbreaks were discussed. Rather, union officials discussed their finances and who would attend outside conferences.

A document has also leaked that demonstrates that the union and the company have agreed to implement an Alternative Work Schedule (AWS), threatening the loss of huge amounts of overtime pay. It was not clear at press time whether this language was for a local agreement or for the "global" agreement covering all plants.

Because Dana workers are routinely forced to work overtime on Saturdays and Sundays in order to fulfill orders for the major automakers, it is not uncommon at most plants for workers to log 30 hours in overtime in a week, paid at time and a half. While this grueling work schedule takes a toll on workers' physical well-being as well as their families and personal lives, the overtime pay provides workers with much-needed additional pay.

The AWS language will allow for the company to continue working its plants over the weekend, but without having to pay workers overtime. The company, at its discretion, can elect to set up a separate weekend crew on an AWS working 10 hours each day on Friday through Monday. These workers will not be eligible for overtime until they have worked 10 hours. While the document pledges that AWS shifts will be voluntary for existing workers, it also allows the company to hire new workers specifically to the new shift. In addition, workers on the new AWS will not work under a set job classification, and management will cross-train them in order to move them around the plant as needed.

When one Fort Wayne worker found out about the AWS scheme, she exclaimed, "This is bullsh*t! We've had mandatory overtime basically whenever they want, for years.

The union let them build a stockpile of parts which are just sitting there waiting for us to go on strike. Our CEO got a \$10 million payoff last year and they say they don't have the money to paint the parking lot. There are holes in the roof. When it rains, it's a hazard to walk through the plant.

"Jeff Weldon, he's the big guy in our local Union. He said the company is not going to give us any more money even if we do strike. 'And if you do strike,' he said. 'They will pull it out of here and send it overseas.' That is scare tactics.... No! Really?! You're gonna come back after being gone for two weeks and give us some scare tactics that we need to take this?"

"They're trying to bullsh*t the new hires with a pay raise up to 18 bucks an hour and they're going to throw them a \$3000 signing bonus. The vote is going to be at the plant because there are a lot of tier two's that did not vote last time. And this is how they are selling it to these guys. Jeff Weldon was handing out the highlights telling the young guys, 'don't pass this up. This is the best deal you're going to get.' This guy is going around to all these young guys that don't know any better and telling them to buy it."

An older worker said, "One of our union committee men who was in the negotiations last week asked at the end of the negotiations, 'I wanna know how I'm supposed to take this back and sell it to everybody.' You know it's sh*t if you feel like you have to be like a car salesman and sell it to us. With PATCO 40 years ago, the unions put a knife in our back. They are doing that now too. People want to opt out. I'm tired of it too. Every day I go into work, now I say, this is just stupid. I've worked at nonunion places that are better than this."

As details of the contract continued to emerge, representatives of rank-and-file committees at Dana, John Deere and Volvo Trucks met on Tuesday night to discuss a common strategy. A central focus of the meeting was how to maintain the unity of workers at Dana and John Deere, where 10,000 workers have been on strike since last Thursday, under conditions where the unions were working to intimidate and threaten people into accepting the contract.

A representative from Volvo Trucks, based on his experience during the five-week strike at the company's plant in Dublin, Virginia this summer, warned his counterparts at Deere and Dana about what to expect. "Virginia is a right-to-work state. The UAW used this to try to push the contract by telling people that they will fire everyone if we don't accept it. When you vote down the next contract, they will try to pull the same crap at Deere. You have to stay on the picket line. Don't let them extort you."

A striking Deere worker asked, "How do we fight if the union does this? The UAW is digging their own grave. If they do this, the union will be finished, at least at our plant."

A rank-and-file representative from Dana explained that the UAW has told workers at his plant that it will not call workers out on strike even if workers strike at USW-represented plants. "This is the best time to strike!" he said. "Our pay is not

keeping pace with inflation. But the CEO made a \$10 million bonus. There is no reason we can't all *start* at \$22 an hour. The company is making unreal amounts of money. Right now, they have \$1 million in scrap in our plant. And they are still making money."

The rank-and-file representatives from Volvo replied by explaining that the critical issue was building up workers' own independent organization and initiative. "Anything that puts power into workers' hands is a good thing," one of the Volvo workers said. "We should have formed our committee sooner, that's the one thing I regret," another said. "There is no guarantee, but once you have your own organization, you are in a better position to defy the union's threats. But if it wasn't for the WSWS writing and giving us information, we would have felt like we had to accept the contract in the first vote."

Workers are in a tremendous position, amid the largest strike wave in 40 years in the United States. Dana workers are in a critical point in the global supply chain that can quickly cut off key parts for much of the North American auto industry.

A key feature of the strike wave is a growing conflict between workers and the trade unions that falsely claim to represent them. Votes to reject union-backed contracts by 90 percent or more are becoming the norm. These votes reflect not only a new determination by workers to halt and reverse the decades-long union-backed corporate attacks against them; they express as well a shift in the relationship between classes.

Workers are searching for a way to go on the offensive. The contract rejections have been driven not only or primarily by the immediate issues involved, but intolerable working and living conditions and obscene inequality that has reached new extremes during the pandemic, and the subordination of every aspect of their lives to the profit interests of the ruling class. This requires the formation of rank-and-file committees at every workplace to link up the struggles of different sections of workers, share critical information, and prepare a common strategy.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact