

# Workers furious as voting at Dana auto parts proceeds under threats from unions

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Voting began over the weekend at Dana Inc. auto parts plants on a new contract lasting four and a half years. The deal contains a pay scale that does not keep pace with inflation, no limitations on forced overtime, and a new Alternative Work Schedule that will save the company millions of dollars in overtime pay. The contract follows a previous tentative agreement that was rejected in spectacular fashion by a 90 percent margin, in a rebellion by rank-and-file workers against the treachery of the unions.

In campaigning for the contract's passage, the strategy of the United Auto Workers and United Steelworkers has never been to convince workers, but to threaten and discourage them. Workers are being made to vote on a deal they have not even seen, outside of the self-serving "highlights" packages. The UAW and USW are issuing threats that the companies will close the plants and relocate the workers' jobs overseas if they vote the contract down, or that only plants under one of the two unions will go on strike, but not the other, fracturing the workforce along jurisdictional lines.

In other words, these corrupt, pro-corporate bureaucracies are making clear to workers that the worst possible outcome from the standpoint of these bought-and-paid-for agents of management is a successful struggle by Dana workers to win significant wage increases, better working hours and safer conditions. This is because such a struggle would threaten the sweetheart deals with management upon which the six-figure salaries of the bureaucracy depend.

Despite this, the workers are still in an immensely powerful position. Dana Inc. occupies a critical point in production for the North American auto industry, a position that has only been heightened by the paralysis in global supply chains. Just last weekend, Stellantis's

Jefferson North Assembly Plant was forced to idle due to a lack of axles, which several Dana plants produce. A strike at Dana could force much of the North American auto industry which remains operating to shut down within weeks or even days. One Dana manager recently let the cat out of the bag when he admitted to a worker that the company could not afford a strike.

A strike at Dana would also have a galvanizing impact on workers across the country. A John Deere worker, one of 10,000 currently on strike, issued the following statement of support to Dana workers. "As part of Deere, I'm here to ask you guys at Dana to please stand up for more than a [\$3,000] signing bonus. It's your lives and families that will benefit or suffer with your decisions. Us at Deere are standing right beside y'all."

The unions, meanwhile, are pulling all of their dirty tricks to get the contract passed. The mechanics of the voting process were designed to limit turnout in the initial votes, which were scheduled during the weekend, when many who were not working would have to make special trips to cast a ballot. In at least some plants, voting has been moved from the local hall to the plant, where it will take place under the eyes of management. According to one worker from Fort Wayne, Indiana, this was done at the insistence of union bargaining reps themselves.

The contract itself is designed to prey upon workers' immediate financial hardship by front-loading wage increases that will then be chipped away over the rest of the contract by inflation. The signing bonus, which in collective bargaining agreements in general move in inverse proportion to the quality of the contract, has been increased to \$3,000. The new wage progression, which tops out at \$22.50 at the end of the contract, is

designed to split young and old workers against each other. Younger second-tier workers at the bottom of the wage scale will see small wage increases after inflation, while older second-tier workers will see their real wages decline. Assuming 5 percent inflation, \$22.50 will be worth \$17 in five years.

So far, it appears that this campaign has produced its intended results in some of the initial voting. The global agreement was ratified over the weekend by plants in St. Clair, Michigan; Lima, Ohio; Dry Ridge, Kentucky; Danville, Tennessee and Paris, Tennessee. The UAW claims that the contracts passed by wide margins. However, given notorious corruption and widespread concerns over ballot-stuffing, any margins favorable to the union cannot be accepted at face value.

Regardless, even accepting the results as valid, the overwhelming majority of these “yes” votes do not represent a vote in favor of the contract but a vote of no confidence in the UAW and USW. No doubt among those who voted yes, many, if not most, want to strike for real gains but are concerned about doing so under conditions where the unions have made clear that they intend to sabotage their struggle at every turn. They do not yet see a path to victory in a two-front war against both the company and the unions, which falsely claim to “represent” them.

The contract was reportedly rejected at the Louisville, Kentucky plant, although this has yet to be confirmed. A critical vote in Toledo, Ohio, where workers rejected the first tentative agreement 435 to 0, is scheduled for Monday. Fort Wayne, Indiana, another center of opposition, where workers forced a floor vote at a recent local meeting to authorize a strike, is scheduled for Wednesday.

Voting is yet to occur at many plants, and the *World Socialist Web Site* calls for the strongest possible turnout at the remaining plants to reject the contract. However, the experience thus far, including both the first and second votes, only underscores the critical importance of building new, alternative organizations of struggle, which are genuinely controlled by and accountable to the workers themselves. This means the continued building of the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee (DWRFC).

The DWRFC already played the major role in campaigning for the rejection of the first tentative agreement. Critically, the committee routed the

information blockade the unions had attempted to set up between workers in each plant, many of whom were initially not even aware which other plants were covered by the contract. It established a broader national movement of Dana workers and provided the means for regular communication between workplaces. The DWRFC also established ties between Dana workers with their brothers and sisters at the Big Three, John Deere, Volvo Trucks and other parts plants, and elaborated a global strategy based on an appeal to the international working class.

Under conditions of a growing strike movement by workers in the United States and around the world, by contrast, the unions are not only rallying to the defense of corporate interests, they are serving as its first line of defense. The trade unions are actively seeking to disrupt the unity of the working class by averting strike action and isolating workers on the picket line.

The IATSE union, for example, called off a strike and announced a tentative agreement last Sunday at the last second, sparking outrage among movie and television production workers. The nurses unions, meanwhile, are maintaining radio silence after tens of thousands of health care workers in California at Kaiser Permanente voted to authorize strike action.

As for the UAW, it is enforcing an injunction against pickets at John Deere and isolating that strike by trying to ram through the agreement at Dana.

The trade unions will not and are not responding to mass pressure from below by organizing a struggle. They are doing the opposite--redoubling their efforts to sabotage workers' struggles. This only confirms the need to develop a broad network of rank-and-file committees to oppose the unions' treachery and carry the fight forward.



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