

After blocking Dana strike, UAW and USW pushing through second sellout deal

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With voting expected to wrap up tomorrow, the United Auto Workers and United Steelworkers appear to have succeeded in forcing through ratification of a sellout four-and-a-half year national agreement at auto parts maker Dana. The deal contains wage increases that will be eroded by inflation and allows for the use of a new Alternative Work Schedule for weekend shifts, which would potentially save the company millions in overtime pay. The Dana plant in Fort Wayne, Indiana, is scheduled to vote tomorrow.

Although the unions report the contract's passage by a wide margin of victory, it is in fact deeply unpopular, to the extent that the basic features of the deal are even known, given that the contract was never distributed to workers before voting. It comes one-and-a-half months after a previous tentative agreement was rejected by more than 90 percent and the unions were faced with overwhelming demands by workers for strike action.

Defying the will of workers, the UAW and USW kept workers on the job, where they continued to become injured and contract coronavirus, and spread out supposed negotiations as long as possible in order to bleed off workers' momentum and allow the company to stockpile parts. At the same time, they waged a campaign of intimidation against many militant workers, threatening some with violence and conspiring with management to fire others. This was assisted through the use of a network of spies and stoolpigeons which the unions used to follow workers' social media activity.

The outcome of the vote is essentially a vote of no confidence in the unions. Many workers, perhaps the majority of those who voted in favor of the contract, did so not out of enthusiasm but because they did not yet see a path forward under conditions where they were fighting against both management and the unions.

In keeping with the generally opaque character of balloting, most locals have not even reported a full breakdown of the votes. This means that there is no reason to take at face value the claims made by the unions about the margin of the vote. However, plants which have published vote totals show that the contract was passed amid a general collapse in voter turnout.

Only four plants have publicly released totals for both the first and second tentative agreements: Toledo, Ohio; Auburn Hills and Warren, Michigan; and Pottstown, Pennsylvania. Across these plants, voter turnout fell from 982 in the first contract vote to 895 in the second, a 9 percent decrease. However, turnout fell sharpest at Toledo and Auburn Hills, where opposition to the first tentative agreement was strongest: Auburn Hills had rejected it by 146 to 6 and Toledo voted it down 435 to 0. At Auburn Hills, turnout fell by 62 ballots, or more than 40 percent. This suggests that many workers at plants which have been centers of opposition chose effectively to boycott the ballot. Only 375 chose to cast a ballot at Toledo, out of an estimated total workforce of 800.

The experience at Dana is a demonstration of the key role which the corporatist unions are playing in trying to block a broader movement of the working class for better wages and working conditions. Indeed, the UAW and USW are forcing through a contract which keeps wage increases at a "union shop" below even market rates.

According to the latest figures from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average hourly wage for auto parts workers increased from \$21.73 to \$23.85 between September of 2020 to September 2021, a more than \$2 per hour increase. This is a consequence of both the nationwide labor shortage, which has forced employers to raise base pay in low-wage sectors in

particular, and of increased levels of overtime as companies scramble to keep production going in spite of shortages and supply chain issues.

This increase is more than twice what new hires at the Warren plant, whose pay will go from \$17 to \$18 per hour, will receive at the start of the new contract. It is four times the \$0.50 annual wage increase for second tier workers on the back end of the contract. Moreover, the top wage for second-tier Dana workers in 2026 will be less than the national average for auto parts workers right now.

Indeed, the unions around the country are serving as corporate America's first line of defense against a growing strike movement within the working class. The tactics of radio silence and stalling for time, developed by the UAW and USW at Dana, are being replicated by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) union, which called off a strike by 60,000 film and TV production workers by announcing a deeply hated tentative agreement, and at Kaiser Permanente in California, where the nurses unions have ignored an overwhelming strike vote in favor of continued "bargaining" with an employer which is demanding massive cuts.

The need now is for Dana workers to bring the lessons of their own struggle workers elsewhere, and to raise the warnings about the role of the unions, so that others can benefit from their experience.

Regardless of the outcome of the vote at the remaining plants, the struggle at Dana itself is far from over. The development of workers' independent organization and initiative, which began over the course of the contract struggle over the last two months, must continue. This means continuing to build the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee as an alternative leadership which can ensure democratic discussion by excluding union bureaucrats and their snitches, and link up workers in different plants to formulate strategy, share information and build up support across the working class as a whole.

To get involved, email the committee at DanaWRFC@gmail.com or text (248)-602-0936.



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