

Dana Fort Wayne workers voice growing opposition as USW stonewalls on local contract

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On November 18 United Steelworkers (USW) Local 903 published a letter to Dana Fort Wayne workers stating that they were waiting on the national leadership for direction on the local contract. This comes three weeks after Dana workers voted on a sellout contract brought back by the USW and United Auto Workers (UAW) unions.

The substantial “yes” vote on the second tentative agreement (TA) followed threats and intimidation by both unions. In an added insult, workers got their signing bonuses with massive deductions for taxes and union dues, receiving a net of between \$1,200 and \$2,600, significantly short of the \$3,000 promised. Louisville and Fort Wayne Dana workers expressed the widespread hostility to both the union and company management by rejecting the local TA.

In response to the rejection vote, the USW has withheld information on the specific details of the local contract, including its status. A legacy worker spoke on the reports of the voting. “The vote count was misleading. We voted both the global and local contracts at Fort Wayne. We have the right to know; it’s not right for them to scheme for the company!”

On October 28, after providing the vote count of the global and local votes, USW Local 903 published a newsletter directed to the workers. In the newsletter the USW stated, “Since our local agreement was turned down, we are waiting on direction from our international on what the next step is.” Three weeks later the USW continues to stonewall in the face of growing opposition.

A rumor has gone around the plant that the union sent a letter to Dana to renegotiate, with Dana rejecting the USW letter. Workers have been left in the dark about all of this. Meanwhile, they continue to work under brutal conditions. Workers at Fort Wayne spoke to the *World*

Socialist Web Site on conditions on the job.

“No news yet on the contract,” a production worker stated. “We did get our bonus checks, which the majority went to taxes. The \$2 raise went to taxes, basically no raise in pay. My checks are the same.” Workers, unlike Dana and other US corporations, do not get tax breaks. The most recent filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission, showed that Dana reported \$56 million corporate income taxes on pretax earnings of \$198 million from January to September. This amounts to an effective tax rate of 28 percent. However, the bulk of this is almost certainly non-US taxes, as the official corporate tax rate in the US has been 21 percent since the Trump tax cuts in 2017.

The bonus of \$3,000 was dangled in front of workers to prey on their financial insecurity. The details of the true cost of the bonus were not shown to workers. The USW and UAW took their “entitled” 1.45 and 1.7 percent cuts from these bonuses. Also snuck into the contract was the Alternative Work Schedule (AWS). While the TA, claimed that AWS shifts will be voluntary for existing workers, it allows the company to hire new workers specifically for the new weekend 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.

One worker commented on the AWS, “They’ve done it in three different departments in the past due to being behind. Once they were caught up, they did away with it.” Another worker when reading the leaked sheet angrily responded, “AWS is garbage to screw the workers. [The union] gets this nice company paid office to sit and plot against workers. We work seven days a week, we don’t get outings with the family. No time to spend since we’re tired from work. The company drains the blood from you,

and nobody stops them from taking advantage of us.”

Workers reported that last week over 100 temporary workers were brought into the plant. This week many more were brought in with very little training. Production workers told the WSWS that based on the number of new temps, it seemed like the union and company were attempting to ram through the contract. “We have 10-plus new people in my department, just on my shift in the past two weeks,” she stated.

A legacy worker also reported the influx of temporary workers. “Temps can’t get production out because they’re not trained enough. We heard that 40 more temps were coming this week and next week. It seems like they are stalling [on the contract] to get the staff up to ram through the contract.” Due to the conditions and pay he continued reporting that more than 10 workers walked out: “Some people are not coming back. Management thinks they can just throw people in there.”

Workers expressed concern over the continued spread of COVID-19 in the plants. “We never get word about COVID. For the company COVID is not on the menu. I keep my mask on every day! I did hear that an electrician on second shift was infected with COVID. Eight to nine other electricians on the shift got tested. All of them ended up having COVID from what we heard. It shows that it’s running through the plant, it’s active. I’m fortunate that I didn’t get it because there are no preventative measures. It’s all from word of mouth, not even the union newsletters tell us anything, just like the contract.”

The state of Indiana reported Sunday that there were 1,914 new COVID-19 cases, with three reported deaths last week. In total just in the state of Indiana, there have been 16,737 total deaths since last year, which is likely severely underreported.

Internationally governments are removing even token preventative measures instituted to safeguard the lives of the population. The *Economist* estimated that there are likely more than 17 million excess deaths worldwide, while the reported deaths from COVID-19 are just 5.1 million.

Last Thursday workers heard that union officials from the bargaining committee were meeting to deal with the “no” vote. However, two of the main representatives for the district, Mike Millsap and John Doust, were not present, nor did they provide workers with any information. When workers raised questions at the union office, they were told that the union officials went on vacation.

A longtime production worker expressed the widespread anger among workers against the union bureaucrats. “I was telling a buddy of mine, ‘I’m over it with the unions and big companies.’ The amount of stress on workers makes these plants a not-so-happy place. You work harder, and it takes a toll on your body and your life. Basically, the company is treating us like we’re slaves. All over the country people [have] had enough. History is repeating itself!”

He responded to the Deere workers struggle. “The Deere revote is crap. The UAW tried to stall them while workers on the picket line were trying to make it right. The company has resources; it needs to be shared with the people who gave them the profits. It’s like how Dana is profiting off of us. The raise shouldn’t be called a raise, only our taxes went up, not a penny earned [for workers]. Where is the raise going? Only to Uncle Sam and the company.”

As was the case at Deere, the UAW and USW secured “yes” votes at Dana through threats and intimidation. However, there is growing opposition throughout the US and internationally to these company stooges.

The growing rebellion by workers against the nationalist and pro-capitalist labor bureaucracies was demonstrated by the vote of 60,000 film workers against the sellout contract brought back by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). The contract was declared ratified, despite a majority rejection vote, based on the union’s undemocratic electoral college-type voting system. At the same time the United Nurses Association of California/Union of Health Care Professionals called off a strike of 32,000 Kaiser Permanente workers after announcing a last-minute sellout tentative agreement.

The *World Socialist Web Site* encourages Dana workers to build and support the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee as their independent voice. Contact the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter to get involved.



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wsws.org/contact