

Steelworkers union conspires with auto parts maker Dana to keep workers on the line despite mass infection

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As COVID-19 is spreading rapidly throughout the Dana auto parts plant in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the United Steelworkers union is working hand in glove with management to keep workers on the job, in many cases even if they are positive and exhibiting symptoms, several workers have informed the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*.

This latest betrayal comes as the United Steelworkers (USW) has kept workers at the plant, as well as the Dana plant in Louisville, Kentucky, on the job for more than two months without a contract after they voted down a concessions contract last October. The contract was part of a national agreement involving 16 locations covered by both the USW and United Auto Workers (UAW), which was nearly identical to one which workers overwhelmingly rejected in late August. The unions were able to ram through the agreement at the other 14 plants through a campaign of intimidation and threats, including helping management identify and fire militant workers.

In opposition to the sellout campaign by the USW and UAW, Dana workers from across the country joined together to form the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee, to build up opposition among their coworkers, pierce the information blackout from the unions and link up with workers across the auto industry for support.

On Tuesday, USW Local 903 sent a letter to Fort Wayne workers informing them that the USW International was prepared to unilaterally impose the sellout agreement.

“[The] company and the union is not saying anything about COVID,” one legacy worker told the WWS. “Here is something I heard recently. Wednesday and

Thursday around 30 people went out for COVID. It’s hitting many departments. This is due to the company policy of bringing people back who are sick.

“There is no mask enforcement, even though the company says there’s a requirement. Management sometimes tells people they are not contagious, and they don’t need a negative test. They give people those blue paper masks instead of the N95. Some people are not even aware [that N95s exist]. It’s already dangerous with people slipping and falling all the time, now with COVID, conditions are worse.” He said many workers who are suffering from Long COVID are being continuously hassled by management and human resources to come back to work before a negative test. “The employers are saving money not paying FMLA [Family and Medical Leave Act] to workers for taking time off [during the pandemic].

He explained the legalistic loopholes the USW is using to unilaterally enforce the contract. “[District] rep Doust is telling people that the [local] bylaws are no good. He claimed that the committee for these bylaws are not lawyers, showing that the union is for the company. All plants voted down both global and local contracts in [August]. But when we were one of the last plants to oppose the second TA [tentative agreement] then the union and company isolates us.

“We don’t pay dues for this betrayal. They take \$1,200 from the legacy pensions a month. There’s likely over \$200,000 in the local. You could pay every worker full pay and have a strike. They act like it’s their money, but it’s our money. They’re criminals. Most unions are like big companies. We used to have \$2,400 pretax per month after 30 years of working. Now they the union has control over the pensions

which was frozen in 2007. At 65 I'll have roughly \$1,200 per month. The union will also double dip on dues especially for vacation pay if you don't take the time off. For the company the union costs them money, but they work for them like a layer of management."

A Tier Two worker spoke on the broad impact of the pandemic. "This whole thing is bigger than just us. It's the entire world. Everyone all over just wants this to return to normal. [At Dana] they seem to think as long as you were the only around an infected person for a few minutes then you're fine. It's a joke how they deal with it." She responded to the CDC changing quarantine guidelines from 10 to five days. "It Just goes to show that everything is ruled by money. It makes me disappointed in the government yet again."

A production worker from Fort Wayne told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Friday morning workers found out that 140 workers were out sick. "[The] wife of an employee tested positive yesterday, the company told him, 'Put your mask on and come back to work.'" He said this account was confirmed by the plant safety director. Other workers reported that many more workers left throughout the day Friday due to COVID.

According to the Indiana Department of Health, the seven-day positivity rate is 10 percent, with many counties reaching above 15 percent. There were over 15,000 new cases statewide on Wednesday. In Allen County, where the Fort Wayne plant is located, there were 1,180 new positive cases and 10 new deaths. Since the beginning of the pandemic the state has seen 18,794 deaths, very likely an undercount. Now, with the lowering of quarantine guidelines by the CDC from 10 to five days, infections and deaths will increase exponentially.

At the same time, corporations have celebrated the influx of profits over death and infection. While its annual financial statement has not yet been released, pretax earnings were \$198 million through three quarters last year, compared to a \$73 million loss by the same time in 2020. On top of this, Dana will receive \$46 million in tax abatement over the next 10 years from the city of Fort Wayne in exchange for new investments in the plant and for "retaining" 855 jobs at the facility.

A member of the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee at Fort Wayne said, "[Workers] need to take the next steps, the existing unions are company

puppets. I think the USW needs to be voided. Many of us heard that the local agreement was going to be signed for all five of the USW plants. Just what some of us thought was going to happen after five months of lies. People need to wake up."



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