

Dana workers fired with UAW consent for reporting exploitation, wage theft and sexual harassment

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More and more autoworkers at parts manufacturer Dana Inc.'s Toledo Driveline Plant are stepping forward to report that the company and UAW collaborated to fire them for bogus reasons. The real aim of this ongoing purge is to remove militant workers, lower labor costs, and terrify those remaining to accept worse conditions. It is a violation of every workers' rights, and it is a lesson in the reality of the capitalist system, where workers' lives are sacrificed at the altar of corporate profit.

Workers who are targeted for dismissal at Dana include those who previously spoke up against management or the UAW, reported sexual harassment, became pregnant, were close to obtaining 5-year vested pension rights or reported wage theft. Dozens of workers have been fired regardless of their records or length of employment.

The report of the mass firings in Toledo has generated widespread anger among autoworkers everywhere. A *World Socialist Web Site* article published Thursday on the firings has been read over 10,000 times, including by Dana workers across the county and also by autoworkers at the Big Three. Dana is a critical parts supplier for Ford, GM and Stellantis, and the contract for 150,000 Big Three workers expire this year. These are necessary and powerful allies, including Dana workers' family and friends at the Jeep plant across I-75.

Zareina Walker is one of the fired workers. She is a 22-year-old who began working at Dana in November 2020 and was fired in mid-December 2022 after reaching her two year mark. She was fired two weeks after informing the company that they had been underpaying her for five months.

"A week or two before they fired me I noticed my pay rate was wrong," Walker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "They put me at \$18 an hour and it was supposed to be \$18.80. Two weeks later is when I got fired. I had to follow up, email them, see if they would do anything. They eventually gave me back pay but then they fired me. It felt like they fired me because I fought for my back pay."

Like many of her co-workers, Walker was fired using the "time card trick," the company's main method for firing workers. Under this trick, workers who arrive a couple of minutes late are later approached by their supervisors and asked to sign a time card. The supervisors tell workers, "just write the time the shift started." After the workers do so, Dana then fires them for "lying on a

company document," which is what they call a "material violation" of the contract. Otherwise, arriving late may have cost a worker a half-point on their record, but it would not have been a fireable offense.

This is how Dana fired Walker. "I was called in to HR and Cherita Walker was there from the UAW," she said. "I asked Cherita, 'can they do that?' and she said, 'yes.'"

Another worker who was fired in late January told the *World Socialist Web Site* she was fired months before her pension vested. "I was one of the first ones hired at the plant" when it opened five years ago, she said. She was fired on the spot merely for having headphones at work.

This is widespread. "The union and company are working together. I was fired last week and there were *6 people fired that same day* [emphasis added]," the worker said. "They are targeting seniority people because we are coming up on our five years." This worker also believes she was fired because she has previously spoken up against corporate abuse: "I am opinionated in there, and the union and company don't like that. If you speak out, they will target you."

The worker did not hear from the UAW for a full week after she was fired, and had to call the union to ask if there was a grievance. "The UAW just said the company isn't responding. The UAW doesn't represent us, the union reps are in there with the company eating lunch together!"

Chris Looney, a 29-year-old materials worker, said he was also fired on the grounds that he was wearing headphones at work. "They said I was wearing headphones, but I was wearing noise cancelers because I was getting over an ear infection. The supervisor came up to me and ordered me to empty out my pockets. I said I wasn't going to do that without the union present, so they fired me. Then I talked to the UAW and they said I should have done what they said and emptied my pockets."

Looney said he was also targeted because he was known for speaking up when he saw management and the UAW taking advantage of his coworkers. "If you talk up against the union, you have hell to pay," he said. "There is a lot of sexual harassment in there. Standing up for the workers is the worst thing you can do in their eyes. The union leaders are in it for themselves."

Kennie Brown, 33, was fired in August by the time card trick after two-and-a-half years at the plant. In Brown's case, his

supervisor told him to “mark 10:45” on a time card, and then the company fired him, saying he lied when he really arrived at 10:49.

Despite this, Brown says he “never saw a grievance” from the UAW, which did nothing to help him get his job back. He called and texted the UAW representatives but was ignored.

Another victim of the time card trick was **L’Lorhein Priddy**, whose supervisor also told her to write “10:45” only for Dana to fire her for actually arriving a couple minutes later.

Priddy was fired on January 12. Three days earlier on January 9, she had written a letter to management demanding they explain why one of her coworkers was fired for standing up for herself over sexual harassment.

Like all the other workers, the UAW did nothing to support her. “The union is working with Dana,” Priddy told the *World Socialist Web Site*. “Clarence [another UAW official] told me my second grievance was denied and he didn’t say there was even a third step. They did not inform me there was a third step. They always side with the company. I’ve seen movies where they show the union helping the workers, but that’s not how it is anymore.”

The list of the fired workers goes on:

Antony Sturdevant, 34, started working at Dana as a temp in August 2021. It took the company six months to hire him in as a full-time worker, even though the contract says temporary workers must be hired-in as full-time workers after 90 days.

Sturdevant was fired in retribution for speaking-up on behalf of his co-workers. “I was fired December 12, right before the paid Christmas vacation and bonus. They picked on me for speaking up, they retaliate against anyone who stands up for workers.” In his time at Dana, Sturdevant had helped his coworkers to file four or five grievances against the company.

The pretext on which Sturdevant was fired is an insult to all workers. When a close relative tested positive for Covid-19, a supervisor told him to take a couple of days off. Sturdevant did so in order to protect his coworkers from the pandemic, which is still ongoing—126 people die on average of Covid-19 every week in Ohio alone. The pandemic has caused 20 million excess deaths since it began in 2020.

Despite this, Sturdevant was fired for missing work. “After they fired me I waited a month and did not hear anything from the UAW. Finally after I called around, [UAW rep] Kesha Self called me and said she would write a grievance. She said she would email me, and I never got an email.”

Keira Poole is yet another Dana worker who was recently fired. A third generation UAW member, Poole was fired in January ten days after she filed a workplace harassment report against a team leader. Management fired her saying she was a “no call/no show” on a weekend shift the day after a funeral she attended for a deceased close relative. But Letter No. 17 of the contract says “in the event the bereavement leave is taken continuous to weekend... the employee shall not be required to work the weekend.” (Page 21 of contract).

Poole says, “the union did absolutely nothing. I asked for a copy of my grievance and never got it. I went to Kesha Self and then to [UAW International Servicing Rep Richard Crayon], and Kesha accepted my firing and Richard Crayon said if Kesha accepted it, there was nothing I could do.”

Poole even went to the UAW’s regional office but was turned away. “I went down to UAW Region 2B headquarters in Maumee and walked in to ask for a face-to-face with Rich Crayon. They told me he wasn’t even there. They never emailed me, never called me, nothing. I have been in the UAW for 12 years, my father and grandfather and all of my sisters were in Local 12, and I am tired of this. They take our union dues and they don’t fight for us.”

According to federal filings, Crayon’s 2021 salary was \$132,360, paid for by the dues of the workers he refuses to help.

The list of fired workers is growing, and the timing couldn’t be worse. The *Cleveland Scene* reported that “Ohioans should expect higher food prices in 2023, according to USDA,” caused mainly by the war the US government is escalating against Russia in Ukraine, which risks becoming a direct war between nuclear-armed powers.

The result for workers of the rising cost of living is devastating. **Tayon Roach**, a 22-year-old who was fired from Dana in January, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I’m a 22-year-old with no parents, no guidance, no anything. I’ve explained this to them so many times, but they don’t offer me any help. My car just got repossessed yesterday morning. I’m trying to get back on track but it’s not easy. The union just says ‘there’s nothing we can do for you.’”

The *World Socialist Web Site* demands all wrongfully fired workers must be rehired *with full back pay*. Dana workers must have **democratic rank-and-file control over hiring and firing**. Dana workers have the power to change the situation by coming together in a rank-and-file committee, which will share information, give workers the right to democratically discuss their demands for change, and ensure workers are united in common action, free of control from the pro-corporate UAW officials.

If you are a fired Dana worker, fill out this form.



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