

Stellantis fires veteran workers: “The same thing is happening to us as at Dana”

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Autoworkers have been writing in to the *World Socialist Web Site* after reading of the unjust firing of dozens of workers at the Dana Toledo Driveline Plant. An article was posted Thursday on the WSWWS reporting the systematic firings of outspoken workers opposing the deplorable working conditions at Dana. These vindictive firings have been carried out with the collusion of the UAW. The next day, more workers at the plant came forward, submitting reports to the WSWWS detailing their own experiences.

Workers from the Detroit Three automakers have submitted statements in support of the fired Dana workers and have reported their own situations. Robert Colvin, a Stellantis Warren Truck worker, learned of the Dana workers’ struggle when a friend sent him the first WSWWS article. He contacted the WSWWS to tell the story of his own wrongful termination.

Robert had 23 years of experience at the plant and worked on the pilot team, which is responsible for ensuring that all the parts are on the floor before production on new vehicles begins so the line can run smoothly. On its face, Robert’s experience seems bizarre, however, it does lay bare the disintegration of conditions on the shop floor that have been created by the United Autoworkers Union. The days are long gone when workers considered themselves “brothers and sisters” and union representatives were on the scene to defend workers against mistreatment and violations of rights. As the UAW has become nothing more than the flunky of management, workers are atomized and the culture of worker solidarity has disappeared.

Last September 12, while he was on his flatbed cart on the way to his job, two fellow workers, a male and a female, singled him out. According to Robert, “I was driving off when this whole thing started. I was over in the body shop talking to a friend. As I was pulling off, the male person went across the other side of the line and got the female. She came across the line and just started cussing me out. Then I stopped and said ‘What’s the problem?’ And she was just going on. Not even taking a breath.

“I don’t even know them. I’ve seen them around the plant, and they’ve seen me. And they either look at me and say things under their breath or make faces, but like I say, I see no reason why these two individuals would have something against me because I don’t even know either one of them. So, I stood there for a minute. I’m just like ‘damn! What did I do to you?’ I’m not about to sit here and argue with this girl, so I said, ‘Shut up before I pull your wig off!’ And I left it at that and I went back to work.”

The verbal conflict lasted less than two minutes before Robert drove his cart away, thinking it was over. Later, his shop steward told him he had to report to Labor Relations, where he was told there was to be an investigation of the incident. Robert was told that during the

investigation of the incident he was to be suspended for three days. Because the incident was witnessed by several workers on the floor, Robert was sure the investigation would clear him to go back on the job.

During the next several days, the suspension was extended to one week. His committeeman became involved and it became clear that no investigation took place. The statements of the two workers who instigated the confrontation were taken and Robert was never asked to present his side of the story.

“So after I was out for the three days for them to investigate, that’s when I started getting into communication with the committeeman. He started texting me and calling me and saying it would be a week, then a month and then I get this letter. He’s like. ‘I’ll get you back in 30 days.’ Thirty days!? For what?! Why would this go on unless it’s something to do with the girl?

“I didn’t find this out until after the fact when I asked around. Because I’m puzzled. Why would I get in all this trouble over a little argument. No physical contact and I wasn’t there for more than a minute and 20 seconds at the most.”

The suspension was extended to one month. A month after the “incident” Robert received a termination letter from the company, charging him with “workplace intimidation.” However, the document was dated September 14, just two days after the alleged occurrence, even though it was mid-October before he received it.

“They backdated that letter,” Robert told the WSWWS. “Ain’t no way. Problem is, how could I get fired that fast? For what?? At the same time that they dated this letter, on the 14th, I was being called from the steward and the committeeman saying that I’m just going to be off for a certain amount of days, then I’ll be back. I didn’t get that letter until the second week of October. Those letters come immediately by certified mail. They come immediately. So that’s some bullshit.”

The official letter from Stellantis Labor Relations said: “...you are hereby notified that you have been terminated effective September 12, 2022. Furthermore, you are directed not to return to the Warren Truck Assembly Plant premises. If you should have any questions, please contact your U.A.W. representative.”

Robert has been to all the local UAW officials, demanding help to get his job back. Describing the UAW response, he added, “Everybody in the union is saying this is not right, but nobody’s doing anything about it. Like now, my steward called me three weeks ago, he said, ‘Man you need just chill out and let him do his job.’ I’m like ‘How long does this take?! It’s been eight months now.’

“Nobody asked me to present anything in my defense. I talked to Eric Graham [UAW Local 140 President]. ‘Why didn’t anybody talk

to the witnesses?’ He said it’s up to me to get the witnesses’ statements and I said ‘how the hell am I supposed to get a witness statement from my home?’”

With the help of his shop steward, Robert did get a statement from a witness, four months after the event. She said in her statement: “Bobby looked confused. Everyone looked confused, because Bobby never talked to K before K started cussing and saying what she would do to him. And Bobby left.”

Robert continued, “No I’m not gonna sit back and just wait because this is not right! Like I told them down at international, ‘If I knew I had done something wrong, I would not be in your face right now. I would sit at home or whatever, and just have to wait until I come back, because I did something wrong. But I don’t feel as though I did something wrong.’”

Of the original incident, Robert says, “I was attacked, number one. I didn’t even defend myself like I wanted to, or could have. I took the high road and this is what happened to me. It makes no sense. This was a non-violent incident. I mean barely an incident. It was blown way out of proportion. No investigation on anybody’s part, or they would have known exactly what happened and how long I was there.

“I’m rushing him. I’m putting too much pressure on him.’ That’s what Eric Graham said. When he was asked why he couldn’t get this straightened out, that’s what he told them. That I was giving him a hard time, which I wasn’t. I just wanted to know what the hell was going on and why it was taking so long. So, then he said I was rushing him and that’s why he moved it up to the next level [regional]. And when you move it on to the next level you’ll be out longer.

“He’s nothing but a puppet. He’s doing what somebody else tells him to do. He’s been that from the start. It’s true! Ask people what they think about Eric. And they’ll tell you. They’ll say he ain’t nothin’ but a puppet. He’s the president, but he takes his orders from somebody else.”

Robert’s case has been repeated an unknown number of times. Several workers who have contacted the WWSW about similar unjust terminations, have decided not to publish them due to intimidation and the risk to themselves or family members.

A WWSW *Autoworker Newsletter* campaign team spoke to workers at a shift change at the Stellantis Warren Truck Assembly Plant. The team distributed a newsletter with the statement of the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee alerting workers to the recent mass firings at Dana and calling for support from all autoworkers.

Many workers expressed their solidarity with the Dana workers when campaign team members explained that workers had been fired on bogus charges after they reported such things as wage theft and sexual harassment. They were particularly angry to learn that the UAW had actively collaborated in many of the victimizations.

One younger worker said, “We should all help as much as we can. I work for a third party company and I see the same thing, every day.”

Another responded, “You said fired for no reason? We have the same thing happening here. Give me more of those newsletters.”

A younger worker, Marvin, said on hearing about the mass firings of Dana workers, “I am in the same position. I was switched from second shift to first shift. It was my first week and I was running late one day so I called my union rep to say I was going to be late.” The worker explained that the UAW gave him bad advice that had severe consequences.

“He told me to take the whole day off using family medical leave (FMLA) rather than be tardy. I was fired because they said I had to call at least 30 minutes prior to my shift. They made me sit out the

entire year before I was able to get back to work.

“I tell the Dana workers, stand your ground and know your rights. If you stay quiet they will run all over you. We are all in the same boat.”

A veteran worker near retirement age said that management had been harassing him and other more senior workers, evidently with the idea of forcing them out of the plant: “The same thing has been happening to me as at Dana. I have had two write-ups recently. A man on our line was given three days off for missing something smaller than the size of a drop of water.

“I have been on this same job for a year and never had a problem. Just recently a boss asked me when I was going to retire. He said you are eligible for Social Security so it should not be a problem. And he wasn’t the only one.”

Another veteran worker said he could identify with what was happening at Dana: “I have been in the industry 27 years and every year the UAW gets worse. The quality and the morale are deteriorating because there is nothing in the contract for the younger workers.”

The coming to light of these threats is not a sign of the strength of the companies and their bureaucratic lackeys, but of their extreme weakness.

The appointment of an outside monitor to oversee the UAW, flowing from the federal investigation of UAW corruption, was an attempt to “restore credibility” to the union apparatus. This was also the purpose of holding the first ever direct elections for officers.

However, the elections were exposed to be a fraud. The campaign of rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker Will Lehman demonstrated that the UAW had carried out massive voter suppression, failing to inform workers of the election and failing to update mailing lists, in order to ensure the election of the hand-picked candidates of the UAW apparatus.

Will has voiced his support for the fight by Dana workers and characterized the threats against autoworkers as “corporate terrorism.” Through arbitrary firings the UAW apparatchiks are now on the alert for any sign of opposition. They want to hang the sword of Damocles over the head of every worker to keep them in fear of losing their livelihoods.

Are you an autoworker? Fill out the form below to get information about building rank-and-file committees to transfer power from the UAW apparatus to the workers on the shop floor.



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