

Near-tragic plant shooting at Dana Fort Wayne puts spotlight on abusive working conditions

George Kirby, Shannon Jones**26 April 2024**

The circumstances of the recent employee-involved shooting incident at the Dana Corp plant in Fort Wayne, Indiana illuminates the brutal management regime at the facility in the wake of the 2021 contract sellout at Dana imposed by the United Steelworkers and United Autoworkers.

In the early morning of April 13 a Dana Fort Wayne supervisor fired a gun during an altercation with a worker. Given the rise of mass shooting incidents, workers feared for their lives when they heard gunshots, but management initially refused to order the evacuation of the plant. When workers refused to return to work without an investigation of the incident, management threatened to dock their pay while the union did nothing.

Fortunately, it was finally determined that no one was injured in the shooting. Nonetheless the incident highlights the tense conditions that exist at Dana and the indifference of both management and the United Steelworkers at the plant for the lives and well-being of workers.

Workers at Dana conducted a militant struggle against the UAW and USW bureaucracies in 2021, opposing attempts to ram through a sellout agreement. Workers at 12 plants decisively rejected the initial contract by 90 percent. Workers formed the Dana Workers Rank and File Committee and demanded the setting of a date for strike action to oppose management's concession demands and fight for substantial pay raises and an end to the tier system.

Both the USW and UAW attempted to isolate and divide workers at each plant. Workers were browbeaten, threatened with job cuts and victimization and once even poisoned by management with a toxic chemical spray after a worker tested positive for COVID.

Two workers, a tier two and a seniority worker, recently spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about the shooting and the overall situation at the plant.

The tier two worker described the shooting and its aftermath. She said that the worker and supervisor had been arguing for weeks and possibly longer. Allegedly, after the argument last week, the supervisor went to his car and pulled a gun on the worker. In the struggle two shots were fired, luckily missing the

worker.

"They let the worker who was shot at come back and fired the supervisor. Management never called security or sounded the alarm, just some supervisors came to our area telling us to leave the building.

"It was a big ordeal. First, when we refused to go back to work, Dana said they were not going to pay us. Workers pushed on the union. Then Dana said they didn't 'find' the supervisor and that the workers are not filing a report.

"You keep hearing it's 'being investigated.' The news is lying about what happened, they said two employees or two workers to downplay what happened. Security actually tried to kick off local reporters too.

"This fight was festering for months," she said. "The union and the company pushed it off. It put our lives in danger. Greg Martin, our local president, is covering for the company. We have not had any active shooter training or safety meetings for years. Everyone in the plant is uncomfortable.

"The union says it's meeting with HR. Everyone's badges were shut off from accessing HR, to protect themselves and not workers. Now we have a security guard at the back door. We're told if someone comes into the plant that we are to call the safety manager first, not the police. Well, the safety manager might not be on third shift; what happens then?"

A seniority worker said, "There was a struggle and shots went off into the floor of the plant. It was downplayed in the news as 'two employees.' There's a parking lot in the back with no guard. It takes people to experience near-death before something happens. The company spokesman told the news said that Dana doesn't allow guns in the plant and that only one shot was fired. It was clearly two according to people on the floor!

"It's a big coverup. They don't care.

"The police found shells. Supposedly he hit the worker over the head, and it discharged. Then the second was when there was a struggle right after. If you take a look at our supervisors here, they have serious criminal records.

"I try to look at it like second chance, but these are not petty crimes. Supervisors constantly scream throughout the plant at

workers and then HR makes excuses for them. HR is coming back full circle to the years of Ford. They support whoever the tyrant is while people's jobs are in jeopardy."

The first worker said the shooting was only part of the general breakdown of working conditions at the plant. "There's no safety with the leaking ceilings, they still put out buckets and trash cans. One girl broke her leg slipping on oil, another guy broke his arm.

"They fired the safety guy who was actually filing grievances. Then they brought back the guy who allowed people to get hurt, like the woman who cracked her head open. Really only two union people said anything with the toxic chemical spraying during COVID. The rest of the union guys sit in the office for their own positions and sit on their butts.

"Upstairs there are tier one workers and downstairs we have tier two with some tier one. We have different pay scales and they let the managers have free rein on workers downstairs. They try to split both tiers up and the shooting eventually happened because of this situation caused by the union. People sit up in the office and laugh at workers calling them lazy, even those that are on disability and have to be restricted.

"We are supposed to have a rotation of doing different jobs every day, while supervisors force us to run the same jobs. When someone is on [health] restriction supervisors target people. Then the union doesn't understand the documentation to enforce this. We were the ones who had to make a fuss about it. It's in our contract books. The union is up there 8 hours and don't know how to do this?"

The seniority worker continued, "Unions used to be for fighting the company. [Now] the union and Dana took our pensions and are living high off the hog. There are people on second shift that don't have any training. They don't give them any respect. Management verbally abuses them calling them dumb a—s. We also have Burmese immigrants that need translated work instructions. We've requested them but they are not there. Then we have inspections in the plant and are blamed for high scrap by the union and company. Before if there was a bad part on the line we would pull it. Now management looks the other way to get them out the door. It is contradictory, with scrap management gets bonuses and we get blamed.

"We had a supervisor write up workers for 'not doing anything.' There's an hour-by-hour report to show when machines are down. Well, the supervisor had a disciplinary meeting for the worker saying this. He tried to claim the worker put the wrong clock number. That is what management does, blame workers for down jobs. Union reps would've let this go. They don't lose sleep when people lose their lives. It's a corporate mentality."

The worker referred to the fact that Biden recently spoke in front of an audience of United Steelworkers officials, beating the war drum against China, while UAW President Shawn Fain and Biden earlier this month joined billionaires and war

criminals at a state dinner at the White House.

"Things like labor history should be part of education, like the Pullman strike. I've spoke out against both parties, Democrats and Republicans. The CEO here used to support Trump. Then you see Nazis in Canada being applauded, while Congress is a lapdog for the military and trillions are stolen from us for the military."

His coworker continued, "They're cutting people then immediately hiring more while people are on layoffs. We're all trying to survive," she said, referring to the genocide in Gaza. "The top three percent dominate, saying it's supposed to trickle down. It's like the strike vote, we voted it down, but the union pushes it through anyway. They'll do it again with a new committee coming in. We voted for the committee this week. One guy said he's running and if he doesn't win he'll retire. They were supposed to be there for us. They brought in the tier system, and we're working alongside people making \$10 an hour."

Asked about the Dana Workers Rank and File Committee developed in opposition to the bureaucracy, she stated, "Yeah lot of us want to do this. They can't replace us. Managers and supervisors don't know how to run machines. They're still putting robots in here, but this is only making us work harder. We saw the news on Dana being profitable, but once again since COVID, we haven't received any profit-sharing. Everyone is calling for the union to get a financial lawyer to open up the books. USW claims the treasurer is looking into it."

In the period since the supposedly "historic" contract at the Big Three, in reality a sellout, layoffs have hit workers at Ford, Stellantis and General Motors, as management attempts to squeeze out more profits and cut costs as part of the shift to electric vehicles. The same process is underway at the parts suppliers, as the auto companies demand cost savings.

Due to the just-in-time inventory system, Dana workers are in a much more powerful position than 2021, since a strike would quickly halt production at auto assembly plants. However, workers are blocked from using their power by the pro-corporate UAW apparatus.

As the WSWS stated in 2021: "This only underscores the need for Dana workers to establish new organizations, independent of the unions, which function as scabs and company spies and not as "unions" in the traditional sense of the word."

Workers interested in helping to build a rank-and-file committee are encouraged to contact the WSWS.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact