Dana workers prepare to fight as thousands of US auto parts workers face contract expirations in 2026

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This year will see contract expirations for roughly 4,000 workers at auto parts supplier Dana Inc. plants in multiple US states, along with thousands of other auto parts workers, amid a continuing wave of layoffs and cost-cutting across the global auto industry.

Other major contract battles include 2,500 workers at Nexteer in Saginaw, Michigan and 1,200 at Bridgewater Interiors plants in Lansing, Michigan and the Detroit metropolitan area. Another 1,000 workers at five American Axle plants in Michigan, as well as 900 Magna seating workers in Highland Park, Michigan, also face contract deadlines.

Workers are determined to overcome poverty wages and brutal working conditions. Since the 1980s, the United Auto Workers (UAW) and the United Steelworkers (USW) have systematically sold out strikes and suppressed auto parts workers' wages to boost the international position and profits of the Detroit Three automakers.

In 2021, the USW and UAW bureaucracies rammed through a four-year agreement over mass opposition from workers. In May, that deal, which paved the way for mass layoffs, plant closures, arbitrary firings and deadly conditions, will expire at nine Dana facilities across the country.

Now a new wave of job cuts are threatening auto parts workers. In an October WARN Act (Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification) letter, the Dana Thermal Products plant in Auburn Hills, Michigan, announced that 200 workers would be permanently laid off due to the closure of the facility by the end of this month.

The EV battery cooling plant, operated by a Dana subsidiary, has been hit by falling electric vehicle sales, accelerated by the Trump administration's elimination of EV consumer tax credits.

Falling EV sales have also led to 1,100 job cuts at General Motors' Factory Zero plant in Detroit—where the flagship EV facility was reduced to a single shift on January 5— and hundreds of layoffs at GM joint venture battery operations in Lordstown, Ohio and Lansing, Michigan. Ford has also slashed jobs at its REV-C plant in Dearborn and EV battery plants in Marshall, Michigan and the Blue Oval Battery Park near Louisville, Kentucky.

In May 2025, 295 Dana workers in Lima, Ohio, were permanently laid off. Because the plant was closing, workers were denied "bumping" rights, preventing them from transferring to other Dana facilities based on seniority.

Job cuts, speedup and exhausting hours have also led to dangerous conditions in the auto parts industry, which has a significantly higher rate of accidents and injuries than other manufacturing sectors, and Dana is no exception.

After skilled trades worker Ronald Adams Sr. was crushed to death when an overhead hoist suddenly engaged at the Stellantis Dundee Engine Plant last April, Dana workers reported similar unsafe conditions. "There's supposed to be a lock on the cages, but there are none. Stellantis is like our plant," one Dana worker told the *World Socialist Web Site*. "Some departments have lockout/tagout measures and some are much more dangerous. We're supposed to have our own lockout keys. What happened to [Ronald] can happen anywhere," he concluded.

Even as attacks on workers intensify, Dana continues to reap profits. Its stock price jumped to $26.69 following the sale of Dana's off-highway powertrain plants to Allison Transmission for $2.7 billion, a deal that included the Lafayette, Indiana, facility. Dana's most recent public filing, released in October, reported $162 million in earnings before interest and taxes. Dana CEO Bruce McDonald receives more than $1.3 million annually in compensation, in addition to company stock with a potential value exceeding $9 million.

Behind these figures lies a deepening crisis engulfing the global auto parts industry. As the *World Socialist Web Site* has warned, the sector faces the prospect of a wave of bankruptcies driven by relentless cost-cutting pressure from the major automakers. Confronted with falling sales, tariffs, rising borrowing costs and intensifying competition, the automakers are seeking to offload the enormous expenses of EV transition and automation onto their suppliers. This has produced a brutal squeeze on margins throughout the supply chain, particularly among highly leveraged Tier 2, Tier 3 and Tier 4 suppliers.

The crisis is erupting most sharply in Europe. Germany's auto parts industry has seen mass layoffs at some of the world's largest suppliers. Bosch, the world's biggest auto parts manufacturer, has announced plans to cut tens of thousands of jobs globally, while ZF Friedrichshafen is moving to eliminate up to 14,000 positions amid collapsing demand. These job cuts are not temporary adjustments but signal a structural contraction of the industry as capital seeks to defend profits through the destruction of jobs and working conditions.

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This global breakdown is adding an explosive charge to the wave of contract expirations now unfolding across the United States, as parts suppliers seek to claw back costs directly from workers and rely on the UAW and USW bureaucracies to enforce concessions.

In 2021, Dana workers voted down two concession-filled contracts, while the USW and UAW blocked workers' democratic right to strike by enforcing a contract extension. Union officials openly threatened workers demanding strike action. USW district representative John Doust told angry workers, "You don't get no stipend [strike pay]," explaining that the union would only provide limited assistance based on "need," requiring workers to present copies of their bills.

Ultimately, the unions used a $3,000 signing bonus to pressure workers into ratifying the agreement, exploiting widespread financial insecurity. At the same time, the USW and UAW siphoned off between 1.45 and 1.7 percent of the bonus in dues, pocketing more than $150,000. The contract also undermined the eight-hour day through an Alternative Work Schedule (AWS), allowing Dana to operate weekend crews on 10-hour shifts without overtime pay after eight hours.

From 2021 to 2023, the Dana Workers Rank-and-File Committee (DWRFC) exposed brutal and dangerous conditions throughout the company's plants. This included the death of brother Danny Walters, a 60-year-old Dana worker in Dry Ridge, Kentucky, who suffered a head injury on the job, went into convulsions, and later died.

Workers at other facilities reported similarly hazardous conditions. At the Pottstown, Pennsylvania plant, workers cited dangerously high carbon dioxide levels and inadequate ventilation. In Fort Wayne, Indiana, workers were gassed with the chemical disinfectant Aspen One Step under the pretext of COVID protection. In another incident, a worker fell inside a robot cage, struck her head on concrete, suffered a seizure, and was sent back to work days later. Union officials and management worked together to suppress exposure of these crimes.

In 2023, the DWRFC also led a struggle against arbitrary firings, carried out with the open collusion of the UAW Local 12 leadership, at the Toledo Driveline plant.

Workers at the Toledo Driveline plant recently told WSWS reporters that they are routinely forced to work 12-hour shifts, sometimes six or seven days a week, with the full sanction of the UAW bureaucracy. "We ask for help from the union and we don't get it. But we have to pay dues," a young worker at the plant recently told the WSWS. Responding to the fight by the IWA-RFC to build new rank-and-file committees to mobilize the working class independently of and in opposition to the union bureaucracy, he said, "Me and my friends, we talked about how there used to be sit-down strikes and workers demanded what they needed. It's up to us to do this."

Other contract battles this year

Workers at the Nexteer steering plant in Saginaw, Michigan, face a May contract expiration. They have never recovered concessions imposed by the UAW in earlier agreements. In 2021, workers overwhelmingly voted down a UAW-backed contract, only to be forced to re-vote on another concessions agreement that was narrowly ratified. The deal maintained the hated two-tier system, imposed inadequate raises that amounted to a decline in real wages, increased healthcare costs and enforced mandatory overtime through "critical status."

The contract covering 1,100 workers at the American Axle and Manufacturing (AAM) plant in Three Rivers, Michigan, also expires this year, along with contracts at four smaller AAM facilities. In 2008, some 3,600 AAM workers carried out a three-month strike against massive concessions. The UAW isolated the struggle and imposed a sellout that paved the way for the sweeping concessions it agreed to during the Obama administration's bankruptcy restructuring of GM and Chrysler.

In May, 1,200 workers at Bridgewater Interiors plants in Michigan will also face a contract deadline. In July, about 900 UAW-represented workers at Magna Seating in Highland Park will see their contract expire. Additionally, contracts covering 4,400 Alcoa and Arconic aluminum workers in Indiana, New York, Iowa, Tennessee and Louisiana expire in mid-May.

Auto parts workers are also being profoundly radicalized by Trump's drive for world war and the administration's violent suppression of democratic rights, including the ICE murder of Renee Nicole Good in Minneapolis. Dana workers in Warren, Michigan and Toledo, Ohio have given powerful statements connecting the fight to defend democratic rights with the struggle to defend their jobs and living standards.

Dana and other parts workers must draw the necessary conclusions: The defense of wages, jobs and lives cannot be entrusted to the UAW and USW bureaucracies. The struggle must be taken into workers' own hands through independent rank-and-file committees. Because of their central position in interconnected supply chains, Dana and other auto parts workers wield immense collective power. Realizing this power requires the independent initiative of the rank and file.

To learn how to join and build rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.

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