“All of us need to get radicalized and be ready to fight for what is ours”—Toledo Dana worker

UAW claims ratification of Dana master wage agreement in yet another betrayal of auto parts workers

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The United Auto Workers announced the ratification of the master wage agreement covering Dana auto parts workers who are members of the UAW and United Steelworkers (USW). The four-year contract covers some 4,000 workers at 14 Dana plants in the US Midwest and South. The UAW did not present an exact breakdown of the vote only claiming it was “massive.” However, the few figures obtained by the WSWS indicated substantial opposition, including the outright rejection of the deal by workers at the Dana Driveline plant in Toledo, Ohio.

A letter posted by the UAW Competitive Shop/IPS UAW Vice President Rich Boyer, who is running for UAW president against incumbent Shawn Fain, stated:

> Major gains were achieved through tough collective bargaining. The UAW Dana Council & USW committees and their members stood in solidarity to achieve their expectations and more for the following gains:
> $3 increase at ratification with $700 retro
> $30 in 2029
> $8 increase for skilled trades over life of agreement
> Pension maintained for all members with a $0.10 increase over life of agreement
> $3000 signing bonus
> 40 hr bank to use for short work week

Boyer does not note that the contract would also extend the wage progression for new hires to five years, while freezing starting pay for new hires at a poverty $21 an hour over the life of the contract. Those hired after ratification will not see the $30 an hour wage under the life of the contract. Thus the deal effectively expands the divisive tier system that undermines solidarity and encourages management to victimize workers in order to maintain a supply of super-exploited workers at the bottom of the pay progression.

The contract specifically excluded workers from the Crossville, Tennessee Dana distribution center, whose top pay will be capped at $26 an hour. To secure passage, the UAW-USW included a larger ratification bonus and $700 retroactive pay to active workers. The bureaucracy also organized a snap vote, handing workers only cherry picked “highlights” and forcing them to cast ballots the very next day in many cases.

There is no protection in the contract against the layoffs that are sweeping the auto and auto parts industry, as employers use AI and automation to eliminate jobs and shift the costs of the loss of EV subsidies, tariffs and intensified global competition onto the backs of workers. Following the 2021 sellout, Dana closed plants in Auburn Hills, Michigan and Lima, Ohio.

A Toledo Driveline worker who wrote into the WSWS Autoworker Newsletter stated his opposition to the sellout deal rammed through by the UAW. In June, Dana workers in Toledo also voted down the first tentative contract by a margin of 280-14.

The worker wrote:

> Dana Toledo was the only plant to vote this contract down. The majority of us here stood on principle and voted against this TA and the one before it, because we would not ratify a contract that was unfinished. We would not ratify a contract that didn’t meet our demands, and fell short of other suppliers’ deals. We wouldn’t let our situation here be taken advantage of by Dana, and take the bait of a couple extra dollars and an underwhelming signing bonus. We wouldn’t ratify a contract we couldn’t even read in full...
>
> We’ll make the best of this contract, as we always have, and when it’s over in four years, ALL OF US need to get radicalized and be ready to fight for what is ours.

Another Dana worker posted on Facebook,

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> Our international rep at our meeting yesterday said this was ‘Dana’s best, last, and final offer.’ Or something along those lines. To scare people into voting for it because ‘they’re going to start taking stuff back’.... the UAW knows if we strike, Dana will be mad our union didn’t push this through and make it happen. So they would more than likely cut the union bonuses to give it to us. And our international union doesn’t want that now do they?

A second worker added:

> I think the contract is a joke. We made thirty dollars (in) the nineties. And even if you do get all the money, you’re going to have to throw it into a 401 k or something. Because there is a joke of an amount going towards your pensions. You’re gonna have to work 40 years to even get a $2400 a month pension. Give or take.

The vote at Dana follows a series of contract sellouts in the auto parts supplier industry where the UAW has colluded with management to impose sellout deals over massive rank-and-file opposition. The contracts imposed varied but uniformly substandard contract terms, with pay rates vastly inferior to even the inadequate pay levels at the Big Three assembly plants. The contracts maintain separate contract expiration dates to undermine solidarity between workers at different companies. Needless to say none of the contracts fall due on May 1, 2028, the date the Big Three contracts expire and when UAW President Shawn Fain has proclaimed his bogus general strike threat.

Some of the recent betrayals carried out by the UAW include:

• Nexteer Automotive in Saginaw, Michigan: The 1,700 workers rejected three virtually identical sellout agreements before the UAW rammed through a deal on the fourth vote, held under conditions of threats and intimidation inside the plant. The contract sets starting pay at $19.50 an hour and a top rate of $27 an hour in 2030. That $27 is the same nominal wage workers at the plant earned in 2005; but in reality far less today when adjusted for inflation.

• At American Axle, Fain abruptly called off a 10-day strike by 1,000 workers in Three Rivers, Michigan before it had an impact on assembly operations at General Motors. The contract hailed by Fain as “one for the history books” promised $30 by 2030. But in 2008, before the UAW agreed to cut their pay in half, these workers made $29 an hour—the equivalent of $46.04 today.

• At Bridgewater Interiors, 1,000 workers in Warren, Michigan decisively voted down the first contract the UAW proposed, but the union refused to call a strike. The UAW then organized a snap vote on a new contract. Under those terms, starting pay would rise to $20 an hour, topping out at $29 after four years. The UAW claimed workers would reach $35 an hour—but not until 2033, three years *after* the contract expires. Most workers currently make around $21 an hour, and many are hired through temp agencies at wages so low they cannot afford a car.

None of the contracts include job security or genuine cost of living protection. All preserved or deepen the tier structure. At Nexteer, there is a 48-month “grow into” period for post-ratification hires while at American Axle the gap between “legacy” and those hired after the 2008 strike remains in place.

The suppression of opposition, the systematic overriding or ignoring of strike votes, the deliberate isolation of strikes when they occur and the refusal to organize a coordinated fight among all auto parts workers is part of a deliberate pattern by the UAW apparatus aimed at defending the interests of management.

The UAW bureaucracy is deeply integrated into the structure of the corporations and the state on which the inflated salaries of the apparatus depend. Fain has consistently voiced his support for the US war machine, often wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with a World War II bomber, and has lined up behind Trump’s trade war measures against the overseas rivals of US capitalism. The necessary corollary of this program, which is not just that of Fain, but the entire UAW bureaucracy, is the crushing of working class militancy in order to secure the “home front” in the war with Iran and the looming war with China.

This program is meeting determine opposition on the part of workers. At Nexteer, workers formed a rank-and-file committee which led the rank-and-file opposition that caused the rejection of three contracts in a row. It has also been shown in the growing support for Will Lehman, the Mack Trucks worker and socialist candidate for UAW president. Lehman is fighting for the abolition of the union apparatus and the transfer of power to workers on the shop floor through the expansion of a network of rank-and-file committees.

It is necessary to draw the lessons of the unbroken series of betrayals by the UAW apparatus. As the Nexteer Workers Rank-and-File Committee stated, “The UAW apparatus, from the International and Region 1D down to the Local 699 stooges, serves Nexteer, not us.” The key lesson is the need for the building of independent rank-and-file organs of struggle, not to pressure the corrupt Solidarity House bureaucracy, but to supplant and abolish it. These committees must be expanded across plants and industries, both in the US and internationally.

The decisive issue is the building of a conscious leadership among autoworkers and the expansion of these committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

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