

# Alcoa workers travel to Rome to protest imminent plant closure

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On September 10, around 500 Alcoa workers from Sardinia traveled to Rome for a rally to protest the announced closure by the US multinational of its aluminum plant located in Portovesme. The particular gravity of the situation being faced by the Alcoa workers, and for that matter the entire region, was underscored by a series of recent angry protests on the Sardinian island, including the occupation of one tower by 3 workers on September 4, with a banner that read “pronto a tutto” (ready for anything). That occupation ended after three days due to the precarious health condition of one of the occupiers.

On September 11 Alcoa workers, entirely dissatisfied with the outcome of the discussions about their fate, occupied the ship Tirrenia for 2 hours, announcing that the fight is not over.

If the Alcoa plant is closed as announced, workers in Sardinia will be left with no possibility of jobs. The plant closure comes on top of a series of many other closures, including the Nuraxi Figus mine, in the same area (Sulcis), where 40 miners occupied the mine 373 meters (1,000 feet) underground for a week.

The closure of Alcoa would result in certain poverty and homelessness for about 1,000 families, including those of the satellite businesses who entirely depend on Alcoa.

Many workers expressed deep concern at the possibility of losing their homes because they won't be able to pay their mortgages.

Alcoa wants to close the plant because it is planning to shift production to Saudi Arabia, where the cost of fuel and wages are much lower than in Italy.

On September 8 a fake bomb was found on a pylon in the plant. Although nobody has been charged with the act, it was seized on as an opportunity to reinforce the police apparatus in order to preserve “security”.

Minister Anna Maria Cancellieri called the incident “disturbing.” As a matter of fact, the Italian technocratic government has already expressed deep concern about what it calls the growth of “populism” all across Europe.

In fact, what the government of Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti fears, along with its international counterparts, is the developing class struggle arising out of the brutal austerity measures being imposed on the population, including the job losses, attacks on salaries and pensions and democratic rights.

On Monday, when the Alcoa workers, all wearing black t-shirts that echoed the banner on the Alcoa tower (“ready for anything”), arrived in Rome to protest outside the Minister of Economic Development, they were met by a huge deployment of police. Tensions between workers and police rose, with angry workers throwing bottles at the police. Several were injured in clashes between police and protesters.

Stefano Fassina, economic spokesman for the Partito Democratico (PD), who was giving an interview nearby, was accosted by the workers with cries of “get out!”, “bastard!”, “go to work!” and “vulture!” (see video)

Alcoa took over the state owned Efim in 1995 as part of a devastating wave of selloffs of public enterprises to private entities. This was carried out with the full complicity of both right and “left” coalition governments. Until 2009 Alcoa enjoyed reimbursements on energy costs that were eventually offloaded onto the electricity bills of average Italians.

However this policy of state subsidized fuel reimbursements (amounting to a staggering total of 3 billion Euros) was eventually banned by EU regulations.

In 2008 Alcoa had complained about the high cost of

labor in Europe compared to that in many areas of the world, saying it no longer made sense to produce in Sardinia. That was followed by the announcement of the closure of the plant in Portovesme in November 2009.

On September 4, 2012, the Minister of Economic Development, the ex banker Corrado Passera, speaking at a convention of the Democratic Party in Reggio Emilia, called the situation “almost impossible”. Using the usual cynicism of a callous bourgeois politician, he declared, “we will continue to look for potential buyers, but we can’t deny that it is an almost impossible situation, of low interest for investors.”

National Secretary of the “militant” Fiom union, Laura Spezia, with no less cynicism, said that the “situation is ever more dramatic and the government can’t entrench itself behind the difficulties that it encounters in the search for a solution.” This hollow rhetoric underscores the unions open willingness to cooperate with the bourgeois state in order to create the conditions to keep subordinating the working class to the corporations, that is to slash wages and if required to reduce the workforce to maximize profits.

PD Secretary Pierluigi Bersani didn’t miss the opportunity to advance his anti-working class agenda, saying “austerity measures are necessary, but if the productive capacity has shrunk we can’t keep the [state] balance in order.”

The talks between Passera, the representatives of the Sardinian Region and the unions didn’t offer any solution. What was “obtained” was a slight delay in the closure that was rightfully greeted with contempt by the workers gathered outside the building.

In a staggering show of hypocrisy, minister of work Elsa Fornero on September 6 said the government is “close to the [plight of the] workers” but at the same time she arrogantly stressed that “it would be wrong to say that we can guarantee your jobs”.

The Swiss commodity giant Glencore first, then the industrial group Klesch, are evaluating a possible takeover, taking advantage of the plight of the workers to strike a very advantageous deal by asking for huge concessions from the workforce, an option that will find support among the various unions.

On September 10, National Secretary of the Fim-Cisl union, Marco Bentivogli, who was present at the discussion at the ministry of Economic Development,

said enthusiastically, “Alcoa made itself available to initiate negotiations with Klesch, the only party that has expressed a formal indication of interest in Portovesme” adding, “Alcoa is always available to negotiate with anyone who presents a formal indication of interest.” This is equal to selling off the plant with Alcoa workers forced to foot the bill through the destruction of their wages. This is something that union bureaucrats welcome as a “solution”.



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