

# Allegheny Technologies lockout of 2,200 steelworkers enters seventh week

Evan Winters, Samuel Davidson  
26 September 2015

The United Steelworkers of America (USW) is continuing to isolate the 2,200 steelworkers in six states who have been locked out of their jobs by Allegheny Technologies Inc.(ATI) for over six weeks.

No negotiations have been scheduled with the company, which has made clear its intention of imposing massive concessions. It has hired extra security personnel and employed the strike breaking firm Strom Engineering of Minnesota to staff its plants with scabs.

ATI is demanding steep increases in out-of-pocket healthcare costs and the elimination of employer-paid pensions and healthcare for new hires when they retire. The company also wants to impose work rule changes that would essentially turn workers into casual laborers. Workers could be forced to work 12 and even 16 hours one day and then the next be scheduled for four hours or even zero hours. All this with as little as two days' notice. The company could waive even that short notice if it declares an "emergency."

ATI also wants to vastly expand the use of outside contractors, contracting out about 40 percent of current jobs. This would in effect create a lower paid tier of workers who would have no rights or protection and could be fired at any time. Last week a contract employee at US Steel's Edgar Thomson mill in Braddock Pennsylvania, was killed when he fell 40 feet while performing maintenance work.

The ATI lockout is being used as a spearhead for concessions throughout the steel industry. Both US Steel and ArcelorMittal, which employ 30,000 USW-represented workers, are demanding similar, deep concessions. The contracts covering workers at both companies expired September 1.

By keeping workers at US Steel and ArcelorMittal on the job in the midst of the ATI lockout the USW is

deliberately pursuing a policy of dividing steelworkers, thus ensuring their separate defeat. This sabotage of the steelworkers struggle demonstrates where the USW stands, on the side of the multinational steel corporations and the Obama administration, which are seeking to drive down the living standards of American steelworkers in the name of global competitiveness.

Contract negotiations with US Steel are scheduled to resume September 27. There have been no negotiations with ArcelorMittal since its representatives walked away from the negotiating table on September 11.

The WSWS spoke with workers at ATI mill in Vandergrift about the lockout.

**Dave Shoupe** with 27 ½ years' service, said, "If I could retire I would, but I need two and one-half years to receive a pension and I still have two kids to raise.

"The company just said, 'this is our offer, take it or leave it.' So far we said leave it. I have no problem paying a monthly premium, but they want a deductible, an out-of-pocket payment, which will cost us up to \$35,000 over four years. I don't see how they are going to get anybody to agree to that. I'll stand out here until that changes.

"Nobody here would have voted for that contract. That is why they have locked us out. US Steel and the other companies are waiting to see what happens here.

"The contracting out is not right. They just want to eliminate jobs so that they have more control over what happens.

"I've got a 14-year-old, a 16-year-old, there are a lot of things that I haven't seen that they've done because of working here. Somebody calls off and you have to stay and work another eight hours. Sometimes that's not bad because you make the extra money, but sometimes my boy is playing ball tonight and I miss that. If something happens, you don't get to see it

happen again.

“You have to fight for both the retirees and for the new hires. If you accept the two-tier system, further down the road, they are going to say ‘you didn’t fight for me, so why should I fight for you.’ It has all got to be the same.

“If this goes on, they are going to start losing people. There are people who can retire now and they have until November 30 to retire under the old contract. Then there are younger people who don’t have much invested here and have to go look for another job.

“The economy is not on our side. As for steel, there is not a lot of demand right now. That is helping them out, because if they were busy, they wouldn’t be getting orders to customers right now.

“They have been planning this all year. They had informational meetings, but when they came back with the contract, it was ten times worse than what they told us in the meetings. They are trying to use this place as an example for US Steel, to see if they can break the union. I don’t think it is going to work.”

**Tom Mayernik**, who has 10 years’ service, said, “If it went to a vote, their final offer wouldn’t pass. I work in shipping, this is one of the jobs they want to contract out. If you go back eight years, a lot of people left and the company said they didn’t want to hire anyone so they could get their legacy costs under control,” he said, referring to pensions and retiree health care costs.

“They wanted us to work extra hours so we could get the same production done. I was willing to work it. I thought I was helping the company. But now they want to turn it around. First thing we hear in January is we are making too much money. Who was pushing the button on the hours, it was the company scheduling the hours, not us. A lot of the overtime was not voluntary.

“They want to tell us that we are all on the same team, but they were only talking about how we made too much money. They pretty much gave us a bad hand right from the start.”



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**