

Steelworkers in Detroit call for common fight with autoworkers

A reporting team
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Workers at US Steel's Great Lakes Works in Ecorse, Michigan expressed support for a common fight by steelworkers and autoworkers, who are both facing attacks on jobs, wages and health care and pension benefits.

Two thousand steelworkers labor at the giant mill in the downriver Detroit community producing hot-rolled, cold-rolled and finished sheet steels primarily used in the automotive industry.

"I believe autoworkers and steelworkers should all stand together," a worker with 16 years of experience told the *World Socialist Web Site Autoworker Newsletter*. "A lot of other steelworkers feel the same way. I think US Steel is waiting to see what comes out of the auto contract. "It is a struggle for all of us."

Workers opposed the two-tier system being proposed by US Steel, which is also a major issue for autoworkers. "It is hard working side by side with someone else doing the exact same job and making less money," he said.

The labor agreements for 30,000 US Steel and ArcelorMittal workers expired on September 1 but they have been forced to work without a contract by the United Steelworkers union, which signed an "agreement to continue work." This has only emboldened the giant steel companies, which are demanding sharp increases in out-of-pocket health care costs, a two-tier system and sweeping job cuts.

On the eve of the contract expiration Allegheny Technologies Inc. (ATI) locked out 2,200 steelworkers in Pennsylvania and other states and is continuing operations with strikebreakers. US Steel and ArcelorMittal have refused to even negotiate, although talks are supposed to resume this weekend. Meanwhile the USW is helping the companies stockpile steel, which would be used to weather a lockout or a strike.

A worker with three years said, "I think US Steel wants to lock us out just like ATI. The elite 1 percent are calling all the shots. They close plants, insist on a two-tier health and pension program, and it's all so Wall Street can make more."

Another steel worker said, "We don't know what's happening because we don't hear anything from the union. If steelworkers and autoworkers united we would be a whole lot stronger.

"The companies are using the Obamacare Cadillac Tax to screw over workers and to force us to pay more. I've got three kids and I'm going to get robbed.

"Our government is almost like fascism. A big company like AT&T writes a bill and the senators sign it. Then the United Steelworkers and the United Auto Workers back these guys. It's not just the corporations that are greedy it's the union heads too. They're making over \$300,000."

Like the UAW, the United Steelworkers is closely allied to the Obama administration and the Democratic Party. USW President Leo Gerard sits on the White House's corporate competitiveness board along with the CEO of Alcoa and other Fortune 500 companies.

"From what I hear the autoworkers are facing the same thing we are," another steelworker said. "The unions are just looking out for the bottom line. It sounds like the UAW is trying to do a back door deal. They are trying to keep people from knowing the truth."

A steelworker with one-year seniority who formerly worked at American Axle also spoke to the WSWS. The UAW sold out a bitter three-month strike at the Detroit-based auto parts maker in 2008, leaving thousands without jobs.

Speaking about the steelworkers contract, he said, "At this point we don't know what is happening." He

agreed that both steelworkers and autoworkers, “all need to get together.”

Steelworkers “just barely survive” on current levels of pay and benefits, he said. “How do they expect us to live? I can barely feed my family and I have a wife and kids.

“Health care is the biggest issue. I already pay for the plan. We have a choice of two plans, and you have to pay for the better one. I need the coverage because my wife is diabetic.”

Another worker added that health and safety were major concerns for steelworkers, “They preach safety, but when it comes to production it is ‘get it out the door as fast as possible.’”

The Great Lakes Works has been the scene of several recent fatalities due to the cost cutting and speed-up drive by US Steel, which has been aided and abetted by the USW. In 2014, Chris Castro, a 36-year-old contractor, was killed when his crane tipped over and Antonino Palazzolo, a 31-year-old father of two, was killed in an explosion.

Earlier this year, on April 18, 41-year-old Heather Warren was run over by a semi tractor-trailer as she was guiding trucks in a loading dock. Rather than holding the company responsible, county authorities have charged the 48-year-old truck driver with manslaughter.



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