

Allegheny Technologies resumes limited production with scab workforce

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30 September 2015

Locked-out steelworkers at Allegheny Technologies Inc. (ATI) mill in Brackenridge, Pennsylvania report that ATI is now producing a limited amount of steel at the recently completed \$1.3 billion Brackenridge hot strip mill with its scab workforce. The quality and quantity of steel produced is unknown, but this is a clear indication that ATI is serious in its efforts to force through major concessions on wages and benefits.

At the same time that the company is deploying scabs, the United Steelworkers union (USW) is working diligently to isolate and betray the 2,200 ATI workers spread across six states who have been locked out for over six weeks.

After their contract expired June 30, the USW ordered workers to continue working while union representatives pleaded with ATI to accept their offer of tens of millions in concessions.

The company began locking workers out August 14, only days after presenting a draconian “last, best, and final offer.” There have been no negotiations between ATI and the USW since federal mediation on September 11 and 12 at which ATI simply reiterated its demands.

ATI is seeking increases in out-of-pocket healthcare costs that could rise above \$10,000 per family per year. In an attempt to create sow divisions between younger and older workers, ATI is demanding 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 while also seeking to convert up to 40 percent of its workforce into outside contractors, another form of highly insecure casual labor.

ATI sees costs incurred in the current lockout as a down payment on a cheaper labor force in the future,

whether it forces the locked-out unionized workforce to submit to these demands, or replaces them permanently with highly exploitable nonunion workers.

The company has hired Strom Engineering of Minnesota, a firm that specializes in hiring scabs during strikes and lockouts. These scabs are accompanied by a small army of private security forces. In the interim, ATI has been supplying orders with a stockpile of steel produced through brutal forced overtime in the period leading up to the lockout.

Despite ATI’s extremely aggressive conduct, the USW has made every effort to pacify and isolate the locked out ATI workers.

Workers report that the USW has banned the use of bullhorns on picket lines and other once standard picketing practices. The USW rationalizes these blatantly undemocratic restrictions on the first-amendment rights to freedom of speech and assembly on the grounds that they are supposedly necessary to prevent the company from filing an injunction against picketing.

When the contract for 30,000 other steelworkers at US Steel and ArcelorMittal expired September 1, the union also ordered those workers to continue working. The USW acknowledges that US Steel is intransigent, and ArcelorMittal walked out of negotiations earlier this month. Negotiations are set to resume this week with the USW making clear that they are desperate to assist the company in finding ways to save millions in labor costs.

Andrew Obidowski, a furnace operator with 27 years at ATI, recently spoke with the WWS on the picket line at the Brackenridge hot strip mill about the lockout.

“To pull stuff like this, there’s a hidden agenda somewhere,” Obidowski stated. “I don’t know what it

is, but I believe there's some kind of agenda between this company, US Steel, and [ArcelorMittal]. I think they're all in cahoots. I think they're trying to break all the unions. And I think eventually US Steel and this company might end up becoming one, because before all this happened, they had a lot of orders from US Steel."

"These people [ATI] were treating us like dogs, like idiots," he continued. "I think eventually US Steel's going to try to lock their employees out too. I think they're [US Steel] going send back their garbage contract that they [ATI] sent to us, and demand that they [USW] take it back to the locals, and the local presidents aren't going to do that."

"The top 5 guys here made something like \$20 million and they are complaining about us. They want everyone working for \$11, \$12 or \$13 an hour. It's criminal what they are doing. There is going to be a workers revolution."

Michael Stanton, a locked-out crane operator with 23.5 year spoke about the difficult hours put in by steelworkers at ATI. "Everyone thought the 7 days a week was bad, but it is going to be 100 times worse with the new contract. I've given them 23 ½ hard years. I come to work everyday I can come. If they need someone, they know they can call me out and I'll say that 90 percent of the workers there."

"Whenever someone wants to tell you that a normal workday is going to be 12 hours, that can't be," he said about ATI's contract proposal. "In 1998, they scheduled us to work double shifts. I would come in at 10:30 pm and worked all the way through to 3 pm. I was driving home one day, not two miles from here and I nearly ran over an old lady by the senior citizen home. I was just too tired and was falling asleep at the wheel."

"I think they are trying to shoulder it all down the line to the working guy," Stanton concluded. "Now they are trying to pit the older guy against the younger guy but we have to all stick together. I think everybody has got to get together."



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