

Allegheny Technologies lockout enters third month

Samuel Davidson
23 October 2015

The lockout of 2,200 steelworkers by Allegheny Technologies Inc. (ATI) has entered its third month and has now become longer than the 69-day strike at the company in 1994.

On Tuesday, ATI reported third quarter losses of \$144-148 million, \$50 million of which it claims is the result of the lockout. The rest, the company says, is from drop in demand and falling prices. In response, the company has begun to lay off management personnel at its corporate headquarters in Pittsburgh and other locations.

ATI began locking out its workforce in six states on August 14 just days after presenting its “last, best, and final” contract offer. ATI has hired a small army of private security guards and the strikebreaking firm Strom Engineering to staff the mills with scabs. ATI is claiming that it is restoring some production at its mills.

The company has announced that it will eliminate health benefits for all locked-out workers on November 30.

ATI is demanding massive concessions, including cuts to health care that would increase copays and deductibles to over \$10,000 per year for families. The company is also demanding the elimination of employer-paid pensions and health care for new hires when they retire.

The company also wants to impose work rule changes that would allow the company to set daily schedules and work hours with little or no notice—essentially turning workers into casual laborers. It is seeking to convert up to 40 percent of its workforce into outside contractors, another form of highly insecure casual labor.

Four-hundred-fifty steelworkers at the Sherwin Alumina mill in Gregory, Texas have now been locked out for over a year, where the company has also made massive concession demands.

The United Steelworkers (USW), which represents the workers, has been continuing its policy of isolating the steelworkers. Thirty thousand steelworkers at US Steel

and ArcelorMittal continue to work after their contract expired September 1 despite the companies making massive concessions demands.

In the face of a massive slump in steel production and corporate profits, the USW is seeking to help the steel companies drive down labor costs at the expense of the steelworkers. The USW is seeking to prove itself useful as a second layer of management by pushing through massive concessions.

Steelworkers on the picket lines at the ATI mill in Vandergrift, Pennsylvania spoke to the WSWs about the issues in the lockout.

“They want us to pay for health care and then they want to cut our hours,” said Marty Murawski, who has worked at the Vandergrift mill for eight years. “How are we supposed to pay for the health care if they also want to cut our hours? They don’t want to give us 8 hours a day or 40 hours a week. How are you supposed to pay for health insurance?”

He added, “Plus the company doesn’t want a future for the new guys. The company wants to take their pension from them. These guys on top make \$40 million plus bonuses and they don’t want us to have anything.

“All the steel companies are backing ATI. They figure if they can get the concessions, they will be next on the list.”

Greg Robinson, has worked 15 years with ATI, said, “I figure this contract is going to cost me \$20,000 a year. I have eight people in my family, six children and my wife. Plus my mother and father-in-law live with us. When all the takeaways are added I would end up losing \$20,000 a year.

“They basically want to make us a part-time workforce. We would never know how many hours we are going to work. How can you live like that?”

“I uprooted my entire family for ATI. I worked in New Castle, Indiana for 12 years and moved here in March

2012. I was one of the last people in New Castle to leave.

“My children are 6 to 24 years old. With six kids, and my oldest son has fibromyalgia, health care is very important to me.

“I think the steel companies are coming together behind ATI trying to force through concessions. Corporate America is making millions off of us and they want more. They had this all set up for a year. They gave us a contract that they knew we would never accept.”

Cliff has worked for ATI for 22 years. He is a slitter at ATI’s mill in Vandergrift. “They want us to work three 12-hours days and not get paid any overtime,” he said. “Or if you work 3 hours into your shift and there is no more work, they want to be able to send you home. One day you work overtime without pay, the next day you get sent home.

“They call it on-time delivery. Most of the guys are willing to work over to help the company meet a delivery, but you should be paid for it.

“This company is losing a lot of experienced workers. There are many guys with 30 years. Maybe they want to work a few more years, but are going to retire so they don’t lose everything. There are young guys with two or three years that don’t have much to lose and are finding other jobs. There are guys who moved here from Indiana whose wives are saying, ‘Let’s move home, at least we have family there.’ ATI is losing good experienced workers.

“November 30 our health care runs out, the second week of February our unemployment runs out. They are hoping to force us back. We’re waiting for a fair contract. I was involved in the ’94 strike. Right now we have no idea how long it’s going to be. These salary people, they’ve got them working six to seven 12-hour days a week.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact