

Strikers at Momenive plants vote down union-backed sellout deal

Philip Guelpa
9 November 2016

Over the past weekend, workers at the Momenive Performance Materials plant in Waterford, New York, north of Albany, and a smaller facility in Willoughby, Ohio, near Cleveland, voted overwhelmingly against a proposed three-year contract backed by the union. The vote on the deal negotiated by the Communications Workers of America-International Union of Electrical Workers (CWA-IUE) was not even close with 476 or 71 percent voting against and only 190 or 29 percent in favor.

Workers had previously rejected the company's initial offer by an even larger margin with 86 percent voting against. The terms of the latest proposed contract were reportedly even worse than the previous offer.

The workers have been on strike, manning picket lines, since November 2. Their principal concerns are the company's demands to cut medical and retirement benefits beyond what had already been lost in previous union-negotiated contracts. Strong sentiment was expressed against any further reductions when the proposed agreement was initially announced on Friday. (See: "Momenive workers strongly oppose tentative agreement")

Momenive is part of a huge hedge fund conglomerate, Apollo Global Management, which is seeking to maximize profit by decimating workers' benefits in order to "remain competitive." It wants to shift employees to a high-deductible medical insurance plan in line with the general pattern established by Obamacare. Furthermore, the company wants to end all health and welfare benefits for workers who retire beginning at the start of the new year.

Other reductions in the second proposal included a lowering of the signing bonus from \$3,500 to \$2,750, an increase in health care costs, and the elimination of a

proposed health savings account.

One worker told the *Times-Union*, "This vote speaks clearly. This contract was worth less than the one we already voted down. This is not fair bargaining."

Dom Patrignani, president of IUE-CWA Local 81359, provided no explanation as to why, after five months of negotiations, the union had presented a contract which was so roundly rejected by its members, saying only, "Our people have spoken."

In order to finance its 2006 purchase of Momenive from General Electric, Apollo Global Management borrowed \$3.8 billion, which it now must pay back by extracting super-profits from its workforce. This began in 2008, when 400 workers at the Waterford plant had their pay drastically cut, some by up to half. The union went to court and won back pay, but the cuts were reinstated in the 2010 contract. The company is currently implementing a \$35 million cost cutting plan.

Clearly Momenive, which began preparations before the strike by hiring scabs, who are now being bussed into the Waterford plant each day under police protection, is determined to impose its attacks on the workers. A public statement by the company indicated that, "We continue to implement our comprehensive contingency plans, and both our Waterford and Willoughby sites are—and will remain—open for business despite the work stoppage." There is no indication that contract negotiations will resume.

On the other hand, the union has no intention, let alone any strategy, to seriously combat this mega corporation. Indeed, as shown by its agreement to present an even worse second proposal to rank-and-file workers, the union bureaucrats are determined to keep the workers isolated and wear them down until they are finally beaten into submission. This pattern has been repeated by unions time and time again ever since the

isolation and defeat of the PATCO strike in 1981. Among recent examples is the defeat of the oil refinery workers last year after five months on strike (see: “Union shuts down last remaining oil refinery strike in the US”) and the CWA’s betrayal of the Verizon strike earlier this year.

The utterly bankrupt union perspective is typified by the local AFL-CIO web site, which urges workers to “send a message to CEO Jack Boss, Momentive Performance Materials to urge him to bargain in good faith for a fair contract!” as if Momentive could be urged to treat their workers fairly. This perspective is designed to leave workers disoriented and disarmed.

Workers at Momentive should elect a rank-and-file committee to organize the fight for the broadest mobilization of the working class to defend their jobs, pensions, health care and other social rights. This can only be accomplished through a rebellion against the corporate-controlled unions and the rejection of their support for the big business Democrats. The working class needs to build a mass political party—independent of the two capitalist parties—that will fight for a socialist program, including the transformation of giant companies and Wall Street firms into publicly owned enterprises collectively owned and democratically controlled by the working class.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact