

As strike enters third month

Momentive workers fight Trump's billionaire appointee Schwarzman

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With the strike of 700 workers against Momentive Performance Materials in Waterford, New York, north of Albany, entering its third month and the plant manned with scab labor, it is clear the company is determined to break the workers' resistance to sweeping concessions. At the same time, the International Union of Electrical Workers/Communications Workers of America (IUE/CWA), Locals 81359 and 81380, have collaborated in the slow strangulation of the strike.

The company is seeking major cuts in health care, pensions and other benefits. This follows two previous concessions-laden contracts within less than a decade, following a leveraged buyout that left the company with a huge debt burden, leading to bankruptcy.

Developments over the past month highlight the forces arrayed against the Momentive strikers.

It was recently revealed that a key advisor to president-elect Donald Trump, Blackstone Group founder and CEO Stephen Schwarzman, owns a stake in Momentive. The group that bought Momentive from General Electric (GE) a decade ago, Apollo Global Management, includes six billionaires, among them Schwarzman, who are listed by *Forbes* magazine among the 400 richest people in the US. Schwarzman alone has an estimated net worth of \$11 billion, and is ranked number 45 on the *Forbes* list. Blackstone is the largest hedge fund in the world, currently holding assets valued at about \$361 billion.

Schwarzman, a long-time friend of the president-elect, has been named to head the Strategic and Policy Forum, which will advise Trump on economic and tax policy. This group, hand-picked by Schwarzman, will consist of more than a dozen corporate leaders,

including former GE CEO Jack Welch. In a recent presentation to Goldman Sachs, Schwarzman predicted that the Trump administration would enact widespread government deregulation and corporate tax cuts.

The utter bankruptcy of the unions was epitomized by Local 81359 President Dominick Patrignani, who appealed to Trump and Schwarzman for "compassion." He told the *Albany Times Union*, "I would pray to God that Donald Trump would reconsider what he is doing and have a talk with some of these people, especially Mr. Schwarzman, about what is going on here in Waterford. We are extremely concerned with the loss of jobs, and this guy is supposed to be the new czar of job creation and growth."

Promoting the lie that Trump is a savior of the working class, Patrignani alluded to the sham 'saving' of less than half of the Carrier workforce in Indiana, based on tax cuts and other giveaways to Carrier's parent company United Technologies. Patrignani said, "It is a new administration, and we have to have faith in the system and hope that he can help, in some way, shape or form."

On the other side of the political establishment, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, former candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, issued a statement on the Momentive strike saying, "I stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the 700 members of IUE and CWA Locals 81359 and 81380 in your fight against corporate greed and for the economic security of your families."

Sanders' toothless statement is without substance. It comes from the candidate who, after winning 13 million votes in the primaries based on the illusory promise that he represented a progressive, even

socialist alternative to the parties controlled by the super-rich, threw his support to Hillary Clinton, their bought-and-paid-for representative, who made no pretense of concern for the working class. This enabled Trump to present himself as the only “anti-establishment” candidate in the race.

Mother Jones reported last summer that Bill Clinton received a quarter-million-dollar speaking fee for a presentation to the “vulture fund” Apollo Global Management, which owns Momentive, while his wife was running for president. The contents of the speech were not revealed. In 2013, Hillary Clinton also spoke to Apollo, receiving the slightly smaller payout of \$225,000.

Apollo Global Management was created following the 1990 collapse of Drexel Burnham Lambert, a major investment bank that dealt in junk bonds. Apollo has become highly successful at leveraged buyouts of corporations, which are burdened with substantial debts that are then serviced by asset stripping and attacks on the workforce. While the company is seeking to impose its third successive concessions contract on the workers, Momentive’s current CEO, Jack Boss, received \$5.4 million in compensation in 2015.

Patrignani praised Sanders’ statement, telling the *Daily Gazette*, “We are absolutely thrilled that Senator Sanders has taken the time to read up, study the facts and show his support to 700 chemical workers trying to get a fair contract with a corporate bully.”

In the meantime, strikers have been left to man the picket lines under increasingly bitter winter conditions. The company has fired at least three strikers for alleged actions on the picket line. On Friday the driver of an 18-wheel truck who had just made a delivery to the scab operation inside the Waterford plant drove dangerously at the picket line and nearly hit one of the striking workers. The driver was arrested by police, but only received a token misdemeanor charge before being released.

Local news reports indicate that the company is paying Saratoga County \$7,560 per day in overtime costs for the sheriff’s detail guarding the Waterford plant. A contingent of six deputies and one sergeant is stationed at the Momentive picket line, along with the sheriff department’s Mobile Command Center. The large police presence is clearly intended to intimidate the workers and to ensure unimpeded access to the

plant by the scab workforce.

The Momentive workers must face the truth--they can expect nothing but lies and betrayal from the union and the Democratic Party, let alone the Republicans. The sellout by the Communications Workers of America of the Verizon strike last spring should be carefully studied.

The union has already forced concession contracts on the Momentive workers, in 2010 and 2013, and the company is seeking even more cuts this time. The ascension of Donald Trump to the presidency will ensure that Schwarzman and his billionaire associates will be given free rein in their assault on the Momentive workforce.

If they are not to be starved into submission, the workers must form an independent strike committee that will reach out for real support from other workers throughout the Albany region and beyond and mobilize the full strength of the working class against the strike-breaking operation. Above all, they must realize that this is a political struggle, not only against Momentive’s billionaire hedge-fund owners but against the Democratic and Republican parties that defend them.



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