

Vote No to USW's sellout deal at ATI! Form rank-and-file committees to end the isolation of the strike!

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The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on Allegheny Technologies (ATI) workers to vote down the tentative agreement proposed by the United Steelworkers union this Tuesday. ATI workers must move now to take the struggle out of the hands of the union bureaucracy and link up their own fight with those of workers around the world by forming an independent rank-and-file strike committee.

ATI workers were given a powerful example to follow this Friday, when striking workers at Volvo Trucks in Virginia voted down a third tentative agreement backed by the United Auto Workers. Volvo workers are in open rebellion against the treacherous UAW, which, like the USW, is working hand-in-glove with management to isolate and defeat the strike. The decisive role in mobilizing and providing direction to this opposition has been played by the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee, formed in opposition to the UAW's betrayal of their month-long strike.

Since the beginning of their strike on March 30, the USW has also worked to isolate the strike at ATI, forcing workers to live on starvation-level strike pay of just \$150 to \$200 a week. This is in spite of the fact that the USW controls hundreds of millions of dollars in assets, financed through workers' dues money.

Now, the USW is trying to ram through a contract containing deep concessions. The union has not released the full contract or the various side agreements but only a self-serving "summary." However, even from this, the regressive character of the deal is clear.

It sanctions the closing of two ATI mills in Waterbury, Connecticut and Louisville, Ohio as well as eliminating the #3 finishing line at the company's Brackenridge, Pennsylvania mill. These along with

other job cuts will mean the loss of another 400 jobs, along with further concessions which will mean a continuation of the loss of wages and benefits for workers and retirees.

It also includes givebacks in the following areas:

- **Wages:** The wage increase is the same as what ATI initially offered—a \$4,000 signing bonus instead of a wage increase the first year of the contract, followed by 3 percent increases in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th years. This will not keep up with inflation, which is currently running around 5 percent, let alone make up for the seven years without a pay raise.

- **Profit Sharing:** The contract eliminates profit sharing just as the price of steel is rising and the expansion of the aerospace industry means that ATI will be making millions. Instead, workers will receive a \$1,500 bonus in the third and fourth years of the contract.

- **Health Benefits:** This is what the USW is calling their "major victory." But in reality, the USW has agreed to a labor management committee which will decide on benefit cuts or to deduct the costs from the two \$1,500 bonuses.

- **Retirees' health benefits:** There is no increase for retiree health care. In past contracts, the USW allowed ATI to get off the hook for retiree health care and instead set up a USW-administered Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association (VEBA) funded by a company contribution of \$1 per employee per hour worked. This fund is near bankrupt, and with fewer employees, this fund will be out of money even sooner.

- **Forced Overtime:** ATI will be allowed to continue their practice of forcing workers to work 10 and 12 hour days while hundreds of workers are laid off.

• **Return to work:** ATI can keep workers on layoff for up to 90 days following the ratification of the contract and management, scabs and retired workers who crossed the picket line can keep doing bargaining unit work during this time. In addition, those workers who are called back will be forced to work alongside management who have been scabbing on their strike.

“We should all be united,” said a striking worker with 16 years of service at the Brackenridge mill in Pennsylvania. “We would be stronger if we were all doing this together. We’ve taken nothing but cuts since I started working here. We haven’t had a pay raise in seven years.

“After our last contract, we had 300 people retire. Now they want to cut another 120 jobs. The company is making lots of money, they just want to make more.

“What did we strike for?” he continued. “I can’t live on strike pay. I had to take a second job. I make \$17 an hour with no benefits. This pays for food and gas, but bills are piling up. This makes the contract look good, but it really didn’t solve anything.

“I don’t think the USW was really bargaining for us. We are like a thorn in their side and they just want to be done with us.”

The USW has been working to isolate the ATI strike even from other struggles by USW members, including a months-long lockout by ExxonMobil of 650 refinery workers in Beaumont, Texas and a strike by 2,450 Vale Inco workers in Canada. They would have workers believe that they are in a position of weakness. In fact, they are in a position of immense strength.

The strike at ATI is part of a general counter-offensive by the working class across the world against concessions. In addition to the Vale Inco and ExxonMobil struggles and the strike at Volvo, this includes a three-month strike by Warrior Met coal miners in northern Alabama, strikes by healthcare workers in Chicago and western Massachusetts, and a strike by Frito-Lay factory workers in Kansas, who forced the strike after voting down four union-backed contracts.

Strikes are breaking out in other countries as well. In Belgium, Volvo workers, inspired by the resistance of Volvo workers in Virginia, carried out a wildcat strike last Thursday in opposition to a union-company deal to extend their workweek.

The central feature of this upsurge is the ever more

open collision and conflict between workers and the trade unions which falsely claim to represent them. This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the PATCO strike, where the refusal of the AFL-CIO to defend striking air traffic controllers paved the way for their mass firing by the Reagan administration. This was a key turning point in the transformation of the unions. For forty years since, controlled by wealthy executives making six figures and joined at the hip with the companies, they have played a critical role in enforcing one round of concessions after another.

But their ability to continue this role is being challenged by a growing rebellion by workers, who are beginning to organize independently and find their voice.

A 'no' vote at ATI would send a powerful signal to workers across the world of ATI workers' determination to fight. But in the event of a rejection, the USW will not change course, but only redouble its efforts to ram through a sellout. Therefore, the next step for steelworkers is to follow the lead of Volvo Trucks workers and build their own alternative leadership in the form of a rank-and-file committee.

This committee must begin from what workers need, not what the companies say they can afford. Their demands should include an end to layoffs, the restoration of all concessions granted by the USW, a return to the eight-hour day, and at least \$900 a week in strike pay.

To mount such a counter-offensive, steelworkers must reject the nationalist poison long used by the USW to divide workers internationally and unite with their brothers and sisters around the world in the global metal, mining and energy industries.

Workers who agree with this perspective should contact the *World Socialist Web Site* today to learn how to join the growing network of national and international rank-and-file committees.



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