

Five hundred steelworkers strike ArcelorMittal Tubular Products plant in Ohio

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Last Sunday at midnight, roughly 500 workers at the ArcelorMittal Tubular Products plant in Shelby, Ohio walked off the job following a breakdown in contract negotiations between United Steelworkers (USW) Local 3057 and the steel and tubular products manufacturer.

USW officials have told the media that they have been in negotiations with the company since mid-September attempting to work out an agreement over issues related to health care, pensions and time off for workers, but only called a strike after ArcelorMittal representatives abruptly ended negotiations on Sunday.

Brian Sealy, USW District 1 representative, told the *Mansfield News Journal*, “The company provided us with their so-called final offer and they got up and left the building.” He further clarified that the company representatives left unannounced, and that their actions were completely unexpected by the union officials.

Sealy also stated that workers at the plant voted overwhelmingly in favor of a strike when the contract expired on Sunday. The vote likely reflected growing anger among workers with the seemingly Dickensian work schedules coupled with the recent actions by the company.

Union officials have acknowledged that workers at the plant are regularly working 56-hour weeks and need to go to work every day of the week. One of the central demands raised by the USW was for the company to guarantee Thanksgiving weekend and Easter weekend be designated as unpaid holidays.

The union also said the pension system has remained the same since 2003 and has resulted in a meager payment from the company of just \$1.70 per hour for every 40-hour work week.

The workers at the plant are also split between a three-tier health care plan with rising costs in premiums.

According to Glassdoor.com, steel workers at the facility have a base pay of between \$26-\$28 per hour.

Sealy claimed that prior to the ArcelorMittal officials walking out of negotiations, the USW had asked for “mild increases” in company payments toward pensions and health care.

In a rather telling interview, Sealy told the *Shelby Daily Globe*, “Our idea is that we get back to the table and get this done and get everybody to work. It’s a good time right now. The company is making some record profits. We don’t want to interfere with that. We just want to get back to work. We want them to come back to the table.”

Such statements reflect the degree to which the USW has degraded over the last few years, when a major concern of the union is to not interfere with a company making record profits.

A reporter from the WSWWS attempted to contact Sealy for further information about the strike, but as of this writing has gotten no reply. There has also not been any public announcement about when the next meeting between the USW and ArcelorMittal will take place.

ArcelorMittal, which is headquartered in Luxembourg, is one of the largest steel manufacturers in the world and was founded in 2006 by a merger of the European-based Arcelor company with the Indian-based Mittal Steel. In July ArcelorMittal reported its highest quarterly earnings in 13 years, crediting an increased demand for steel.

Last year, the bulk of ArcelorMittal’s US assets were sold to Cleveland-Cliffs Inc. for roughly \$1.4 billion.

The Shelby plant was one of the few assets in the US that was not purchased by Cleveland-Cliffs. ArcelorMittal Tubular Products, which currently runs the Shelby plant, also operates another plant in Marion, Ohio and a business office in Pittsburgh.

According to Shelby mayor Steve Schag the plant is one of the largest employers in the city, and among the top 10 largest employers in Richland County, Ohio, located midway between Columbus and Cleveland. The Shelby facility has been in operation since 1890.

According to the ArcelorMittal website, the Shelby plant produces tubes and mandrels used by the automotive and farm machinery industry.

Both industries have experienced rebellions of rank-and-file workers, as Dana auto parts workers rejected a sellout agreement put forward by the USW and United Auto Workers (UAW) in August and over 10,000 workers at the agricultural equipment giant John Deere rejected a UAW contract in October and are currently on strike.

In the case of Dana workers, the UAW and USW kept workers on the job without a contract for roughly one and a half months. The unions then pushed through a contract that was nearly identical to the previous agreement, which had been rejected by 90 percent.

At Deere, workers similarly rejected a contract by roughly 90 percent and forced the UAW to call a strike. Despite Dana producing parts for Deere, the UAW rejected any attempt to unite the 10,000 workers at Deere with the nearly 3,000 at Dana. The UAW is currently organizing a vote on a second sellout agreement at the agricultural giant.

In the case of both Dana and Deere, workers formed rank-and-file committees in order to organize against attempts by the companies and unions to impose a concession contract. The *World Socialist Web Site* encourages the workers at ArcelorMittal and other steel companies to contact us for help building a rank-and-file committee.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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