

USW invites economic chauvinist politician, Sherrod Brown, to ArcelorMittal Tubular Products picket line

Isaac Finn**7 November 2021**

As the strike of roughly 500 workers at ArcelorMittal Tubular Products plant in Shelby, Ohio enters its second week, the United Steelworkers (USW) has responded by inviting economic nationalist Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown to the picket line.

The purpose of inviting Brown, a senior Ohio politician with close ties to both the USW and steel corporations, is an attempt to redirect workers angered over long hours and poor working conditions in a reactionary nationalist direction.

The strike began on Sunday, October 31 at midnight after representatives from ArcelorMittal gave their “final offer” and walked out of negotiations with USW Local 3057. Norm Shoemaker, USW Local 3057 president, told the *Richland Source*, “Shelby ArcelorMittal walked away abruptly from the negotiating table, which we believe warrants an Unfair Labor Practice charge.”

Officials from the USW have stated that the major sticking points in the contract include unpaid days off, health care and pensions.

Prior to the strike, it was common for workers at the plant to regularly work 56-hour weeks and report to work every day of the week. Union officials have told the press that they are currently asking the company to grant certain weekends off, particularly those of Thanksgiving weekend and Easter weekend, but only as unpaid holidays.

Shoemaker has asserted that the pension has only been addressed twice in the last 20 years, and that the yearly multiplier has dropped in that time from \$75 to \$54.

Workers at ArcelorMittal Tubular Products are also split by a three-tier health care plan, with newer hires

having to pay larger premiums and deductibles.

Officials from the USW met with the company’s negotiating team on Tuesday and Wednesday last week. Another meeting is planned for Monday, November 8, the same day that Brown is scheduled to address workers.

According to Shoemaker, the senator will likely start at the union hall before walking to the picket line.

Brown is a reactionary economic nationalist, frequently making statements promoting various “Made in America” campaigns and anti-Mexican and anti-Chinese chauvinism. As a result of his extreme nationalist and corporatist views, Brown has become the darling of both the union bureaucracies and industrial lobbying groups. He enjoys a particularly close relationship with the United Auto Workers (UAW), USW and major steel corporations.

Brown was deeply involved in the discussions with General Motors over the closure of its plant in Lordstown, Ohio. During the political debate, Brown and then-president Donald Trump came into open conflict over which right-wing nationalist agenda should be implemented to “save jobs,” all inevitably involving further concessions by workers.

Brown was particularly defensive over Trump’s denunciation of UAW Local 1112 President David Green. While Trump openly called for more concessions from workers at Lordstown, Brown called Trump’s comments “disgraceful,” but failed to explain why workers should trust a union, up to its armpits in collaboration with management, where officials were convicted of taking massive bribes from the auto companies. His alternative to Trump was to promote a massive taxpayer subsidy to the auto companies in the

form of the American Cars, American Jobs Act.

As with all attempts to “save American jobs” through concessions and subsidies, the attempts to keep production at Lordstown largely failed. GM eventually sold the plant to Lordstown Motors, an electric vehicle manufacturer with an uncertain future.

In the case of the steel industry, Brown has developed an even closer relationship with the USW and the companies. In 2016, the American Iron and Steel Institute (AISI), an association of the steel companies in North America, bestowed him with the 2015-2016 Congressional Steel Champion Award for his work in the Senate Steel Caucus.

In September, Brown toured Cleveland-Cliffs’ Toledo plant alongside officials from the company and the USW. The purpose of his tour was to promote the nationalist Build America Buy America Act and the Biden administration’s infrastructure bill, and push the fraudulent narrative that high tariffs will guarantee high paying jobs for workers in the US.

The previous month, Brown issued a statement similarly hailing Cleveland-Cliffs and pushing the line that American steel was an imperative for national security. In his statement he claimed that Russia and China were “circumventing U.S. trade laws” by moving steel products through Canada and Mexico.

Last year Cleveland-Cliffs purchased the majority of the Luxembourg-based ArcelorMittal’s US assets for roughly \$1.4 billion. The Shelby plant was one of only a handful of assets in America that ArcelorMittal kept.

On November 1, the first day of the strike, Brown spoke at a joint meeting of the AISI and Steel Manufacturers Association (SMA) at which he hailed the American steel industry.

Given his record, it can be safely assumed that the senior lawmaker will address the striking workers with statements combining national chauvinism and a glorification of the infrastructure bill sponsored by the Biden administration, which is in fact billion-dollar handouts to the corporations.

The economic nationalism pushed by Brown and the USW is aimed at driving a wedge between American workers and their brothers and sisters overseas. The outpouring directed against “foreign” steel takes place amid an ongoing rebellion of US autoworkers and a wave of strikes internationally.\

Workers should take a warning from the rotten role

played by the USW in isolating and strangling a powerful 106-day strike by 1,300 workers at Pittsburgh-based Allegheny Technologies earlier this year. After being starved on the picket line with less than \$200 weekly strike pay workers were saddled with a concessions contract that sanctioned the elimination of hundreds of jobs.

The strike in Ohio coincides with an ongoing strike of roughly 10,000 workers at John Deere. On November 2, the majority of workers at the agricultural equipment manufacturer followed the advice of the Deere Workers Rank-and-File Committee and rejected the second sellout agreement proposed by the UAW and company.

The Shelby plant produces tubes and mandrels used by the automotive and farm machinery industry.

Over the last few years, ArcelorMittal plants have seen strikes involving thousands of workers. This year more than 150,000 steel and metal workers in South Africa participated in a four-week strike that effectively hobbled production at ArcelorMittal’s South African division. From early May to June, 2,500 ArcelorMittal workers in Canada were on strike until the USW was able to force through an agreement.

The promotion of national chauvinism—whether by Democrats, Republicans or union officials—is a diversion aimed at stoking animosity toward brother workers overseas while the union attempts to force through a sellout agreement. In order to carry out any struggle for decent benefits and working hours, workers throughout the steel and auto industries must build rank-and-file committees as a means of uniting their struggles nationally and globally. Workers can contact the *World Socialist Web Site* for assistance in building these committees.



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