

“It’s almost like it’s the year of the strike”

Aluminum workers furious over USW’s last minute deal with Arconic

Marcus Day
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Are you an Arconic worker? Contact us to tell us what you think of this contract and the fight to organize rank-and-file opposition to it.

Aluminum workers are angry over a four-year proposed deal which the United Steelworkers (USW) union suddenly announced Saturday, which covers 3,400 workers at Arconic facilities in Davenport, Iowa; Alcoa, Tennessee; Lafayette, Indiana; and Massena, New York.

The tentative contract, which will be voted on at a still unspecified date, would include a 7 percent raise the first year and 4.5 percent raises the next three years. This would result in a cut in real wages, given that current annualized inflation is 8.3 percent. The deal also eliminates a performance-based pay scheme previously agreed to by the USW, which many workers depended on because of decades of union-backed concessions at Arconic’s predecessor company Alcoa Aluminum.

The USW bargaining committee unanimously backed the deal, claiming it had reached a “fair deal” with “more details to come.” Officials from USW Local 105 in Davenport said, “The hourly wage increases are to make up for the termination” of the pay-for-performance plan.

Well aware that the deal would encounter mass opposition, USW and management agreed to a \$2,000 signing bonus and another \$2,000 in January 2023.

Management praised the USW, saying the deal “accomplishes our goal of rewarding our employees for their commitment as essential workers while enabling our business to grow for future sustainability.”

Despite censoring many critical comments, the Local 105 Facebook page was filled with denunciations of the

deal and calls by workers to reject it. “Absolute garbage!!!! No deal!!!!” one worker wrote. Many workers liked the post of another worker, which declared, “Garbage 1st attempt. Time for a strike.”

Pointing to the fact that the USW was keeping workers in the dark about the further contents of the deal and when it would organize ratification meetings, another worker wrote sarcastically, “It would be nice to know what it is. Wondering minds need to know.”

Workers at Davenport and other locals unanimously voted to authorize a strike on May 12. Just hours before announcing the deal, the USW organized rallies in front of production facilities in several states under the heading “Fair contract now!”

This included workers at Arconic’s massive Davenport Works plant in Riverdale, Iowa, which covers 6.5 million square feet. The factory, which employs around 1,900, produces aluminum sheets and plates for the aerospace and auto industries, including Ford Motor Company’s top-selling F-150 trucks.

Workers who spoke to the WSWWS said they were determined to win improvements to wages and benefits.

Diane, a veteran worker at the facility, pointed to the contrast between the company’s rising sales and its resistance to providing workers decent wages. “What they just made was up 31 percent from last year’s earnings. And we’ve gotten zero, absolutely nothing for our performance pay. We’re not too happy.” At the same time, Arconic has been squandering hundreds of millions of dollars on stock buybacks, she said, which are aimed at driving up the company’s share price.

Workers at Arconic—like Deere and CNH workers, Caterpillar workers, autoworkers, and others—are fed up with being called “essential” while not having their

basic needs met. Throughout the pandemic, Davenport Works remained open, while workers were sickened with COVID-19. “We had one man die, one of the first ones in the area, and then we lost I think two or three more. And a bunch have been off sick for over a year.

“It’s very dangerous in there. We’ve had people get hurt. People are put in areas they’re not familiar with. A gentleman I knew, right after I started, was killed. It’s not a safe place. And the heat, it’s hot in there.”

Similar to workers at CNH, Arconic workers have drawn inspiration from the courageous, five-week-long strike at John Deere last year. Arconic’s Davenport Works is located in the Quad Cities, a metropolitan region in Iowa and Illinois straddling the Mississippi River, where Deere also has its headquarters.

“We were right there with them at Deere, and we were right there with Cobham [aerospace workers] down on Hickory Road, although they didn’t fare so well. We just want a little piece of the pie.

“Things have got to change. It’s almost like it’s the year of the strike.”

The USW will now run out its well-worn machinery to try to pass this sellout contract, including rushing a vote before workers have sufficient time to study it. But Arconic workers will have something to say about this.

Like the Deere workers and others, Arconic workers will have to organize their own rank-and-file committee , consisting of the most militant workers, to oppose the USW sellout and advance their own demands to protect their living standards and win substantial improvements in wages, benefits and working conditions.



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