

Arconic workers denounce United Steelworkers contract proposal

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Work at Arconic? Tell us what you think about the tentative agreement, and what you think workers should be fighting for. Comments will be published anonymously.

Anger from aluminum workers at Arconic facilities continues to boil after the United Steelworkers (USW) proposed a contract agreement that will effectively cut their wages over the life of the four-year deal. The tentative agreement, which covers workers at plants in Iowa, Tennessee, Indiana and New York, was announced by the USW on May 15, a few days after workers unanimously voted to authorize a strike. Workers will vote on the contract on June 1.

“The USW came right out the gate endorsing a tentative agreement saying 20.5% wage increase, but failed to mention that on average 6% PFP (pay for performance) was taken,” Chuck, an Iowa Arconic worker told the WSW. “They gave with one hand and with the slide of the other hand took away 6 percent. All while the union announced to the local community, ‘We got 20.5% raise.’ This is lies, all lies.”

“I am unhappy with the contract,” said Jack, another Iowa worker. “I feel the wage increases are not enough to justify the removal of the pay for performance system. I am aware the pay for performance system has its flaws under its current condition, but it is still averaging 5% a year or more overall.”

“I would much rather see the pay for performance be renegotiated into a set formulation with set numbers or percentages that can be verified,” he added. “The current system allows the company to control all formulated values, which allowed them to rob us of our pay for performance despite having a very profitable quarter.”

Jack also spoke about the impact of rising prices. “Inflation at its current rate of around 8.3% to 8.5%

adds a ton to yearly costs. You are adding thousands more in living expenses every year.”

“There were no changes to health care as a whole and that’s a good thing. But I can almost guarantee they will try to increase health care costs next contract. There is an ‘essential worker’ bonus paid out both this year and next (for company tax purposes) however no sign-on bonus. It’s a slap in the face to everyone who came in and risked getting their family sick during 2020 and 2021. It would almost seem like \$4,000 was all that risk was worth.”

After attending USW meetings on the contract Jack said, “I left pretty upset that we couldn’t really get any good answers to our questions. I don’t think they really understand the implications of the removal of PFP especially with the raise and inflation. I am going to vote no.”

Workers on social media have also been vocal in opposing the sellout agreement. One worker outlined the demands he said workers should fight for: “1. Keep PFP 2. \$5,000 signing bonus 3. At least \$5,000 essential worker pay with both signing bonus and essential worker pay paid out immediately upon ratification of contract. 4. 10% raise every year for the four years which ultimately means 40% by end of contract.”

Another said workers should prepare to walk out. “The way I see it is that even when we vote ‘no’ then the union will go back to negotiating but we will still be working making the company more money. What the hell was the strike authorization vote for if we don’t use it??? We should strike right after the votes are tallied.”

While workers are outraged at the contract proposal, the USW is working closely with the Biden administration to ensure that wages are kept low. In March, USW president Tom Conway bragged that the

union had imposed a “responsible contract” on 30,000 oil refinery workers that “did not add to inflationary pressures.” The rotten deal included a 2.5 percent raise for 2022 and an average 3 percent annual increase over four years.

The USW has spent decades colluding with the steel and aluminum bosses in the destruction of the jobs, living standards, working conditions and pensions of hundreds of thousands of workers.

Workers, however, are increasingly prepared to wage a fight based on their needs, not what the USW or the company tells them they can afford.

But the critical element necessary for workers to win is leadership and organization. This means taking the struggle into their own hands through forming rank-and-file factory committees to campaign for the defeat of this sellout contract, outlining their own demands and preparing strike action to win them. Workers in various industries have already begun to take up this initiative including at John Deere, Volvo Mack, CNH, and many other areas of struggle. We encourage all Arconic workers interested in forming a rank-and-file committee to contact us today.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact