

Vote NO on the USW-Arconic sellout contract! Build rank-and-file committees to prepare a workers' counteroffensive for higher wages!

Marcus Day
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Work at Arconic? Let us know what you think about the contract and what workers should be fighting for.

On Wednesday, roughly 3,400 Arconic aluminum manufacturing workers in Iowa, Tennessee, Indiana and New York will be voting on a tentative agreement negotiated and endorsed by the United Steelworkers union.

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges Arconic workers to overwhelmingly reject the USW's miserable pro-company contract proposal.

A defiant rejection of the deal should be taken as the starting point for workers to organize independently and prepare a counteroffensive for higher wages and benefits. Rank-and-file committees should be initiated at each plant in order to draw up a list of demands based on what all workers actually need and to make real preparations to fight for them, including setting a deadline for a walkout.

The USW sellout deal being voted on Wednesday would result in workers earning *less* in real terms by the end of the four-year contract than they do now.

The agreement includes raises of 7 percent in the first year, and 4.5 percent in each of the next three years, under conditions in which inflation is currently running at 8.5 percent. If inflation remains at its current rate, *real wages would fall by approximately 14 percent* during the contract.

Along with the below-inflation raises, the contract removes the "Pay for Performance" (PFP) incentive pay system, which workers have grown to rely on after years of USW contracts with stagnating base wage increases. The deal would include signing bonuses of \$2,000 this year and \$2,000 in 2023, a substantial chunk of which will be eaten up by taxes and union dues.

The USW announced the tentative agreement on May 14, less than a day before the expiration of the previous contract, despite unanimous strike authorization votes by workers earlier in the month. The USW has not called a strike among

the aluminum workers since 1986, when the plants were still part of Alcoa, which spun off Arconic in 2016.

The blatantly inadequate terms of the contract have provoked widespread anger. Workers are particularly indignant over being deemed "essential" during the pandemic, only for Arconic and the USW to return with a contract proposal that would send their living standard backwards.

On social media, workers have conducted several informal polls showing the overwhelming majority are opposed to the agreement, with many campaigning for a resounding "no" vote on Wednesday.

Pointing to the impact of rising fuel prices, one worker commented on Facebook Tuesday, "Gas in Illinois is \$5.50 a gallon, how much more is it going up? Raise we are getting offered will be about what it will take you to get to work. Cost of living going up. We need a better offer. Think when you vote."

Others denounced the USW for pushing the deal, with another worker writing: "We're being played. 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 otherwise we would be just bluffing and the company knows it..."

Another worker wrote simply, "I don't want a fair contract. I demand a good one."

Workers have voiced their opposition in forums created independently of the USW, since the union bureaucracy has sought to muzzle critical comments. Local 105 in Iowa, for example, has disabled comments on the vast majority of its Facebook posts since the deal was announced.

While censoring workers, USW officials have praised the pro-company deal, falsely presenting it as a victory. "Our

committee unanimously approved the contract. I don't foresee any problems with it," Tony Montana, a USW spokesman, arrogantly told the *Quad Cities Business Journal*.

But the company has made clear this is the contract it wants. John Riches, Arconic Davenport Works communications and public affairs manager, told the same publication, "We believe this agreement accomplishes our goal of rewarding our employees for their commitment as essential workers while enabling our business to grow for future sustainability."

Arconic's management is relying on the USW to sell the deal to workers, hoping to force through a contract which will enable the company to wring even greater profits out of workers.

In 2021, Arconic saw both its sales and earnings increase. The company had revenue of \$7.5 billion, up 32 percent from the previous year, and adjusted EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization, a measure of profitability) of \$712 million, a 15 percent increase.

While the company is attempting to impose cuts in real wages on workers, it has handed over huge sums to shareholders and top executives. Arconic has authorized share buybacks of \$300 million over the last two years, and gave CEO Tim Myers a compensation package of \$10.6 million in 2021, up a staggering 69 percent from what he received the year prior.

Arconic workers occupy a strategically important position, manufacturing aluminum products that are critical for Ford's F-150 pickups and Boeing's commercial aircraft. This powerful position, however, is precisely why the USW is seeking to avoid a strike. A walkout would threaten to disrupt key sectors of the US economy, galvanize a rebellion among broader sections of workers for higher wages and undermine the Biden administration's escalating proxy war against Russia in Ukraine.

The USW's efforts to push through Arconic's demands are in line with its conduct in other industries. Just last weekend, the USW rammed through a wretched pro-company deal at Chevron, shutting down and betraying a two-month-long strike by 500 oil refinery workers in the California Bay Area. That agreement also contained raises far below inflation, with wage increases totaling just 12 percent over four years. The contract the USW brought to a snap vote on Saturday was even worse than the contract Richmond Chevron workers had rejected twice in March.

Earlier this year, the USW browbeat 30,000 oil and gas workers nationally into accepting a contract with cuts to real wages. The union announced a tentative agreement just days after USW President Tom Conway met with Biden. Later,

the USW boasted that the deal was "a responsible contract that does not add to price gouging or inflationary pressures." In other words, the USW throttled workers' wages to a level low enough to be acceptable to corporate America and the political establishment.

But Arconic workers, like their brothers and sisters at John Deere, CNH, and elsewhere, are determined to win substantial improvements to their wages, benefits and working conditions.

Surging inflation, degrading working conditions and obscene levels of inequality are driving workers around the world into struggle, including thousands of car haulers and 15,000 nurses in Minnesota. In every case, workers are coming into headlong conflict with the pro-corporate trade unions, which for decades have functioned as management representatives, imposing concession after concession.

In response, growing numbers of workers have begun to organize independently, launching rank-and-file committees at John Deere, Volvo Trucks, CNH, and among educators and nurses over the last year. These committees have provided a means for workers to share information across workplaces and outside official channels, as well as countering the propaganda of both the corporations and their lackeys in the unions.

A "no" vote at Arconic is just the first step. For Arconic workers to secure their interests—including for major wage increases, cost-of-living raises to guard against inflation, fully paid health benefits, serious relief from grueling overtime, and more—new organizations, democratically controlled by workers themselves, are needed. Such committees, in contrast to the USW, will proceed from the nonnegotiable needs of workers, not what the companies claim they can afford.

The WSWS will provide every assistance possible in helping establish and organize these committees. To discuss forming a committee, fill out the form below:



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