

Organize rank-and-file committees to demand a recount!

“Who counted the votes?”: Arconic workers erupt in anger after USW claims contract ratification

Marcus Day

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Arconic workers: Speak your mind! Fill out the form at the end of this article to tell us what you think of the contract and the USW's claims it was ratified. Comments will be published anonymously.

Arconic aluminum workers in the US erupted in disbelief and anger Wednesday night after the United Steelworkers union claimed that a new four-year contract had been ratified, despite widespread opposition in the run-up to the vote. At 9:23 p.m. Eastern, the union sent a mass text to workers stating, “We have ratified our contract with Arconic. Thanks for your support. Our solidarity was key!”

According to local Quad Cities news station WQAD, the USW claimed that the agreement passed by 60 percent, with a margin of just 350 votes out of roughly 3,400 workers at plants in Iowa, Tennessee, Indiana and New York. The union told the station that it would not be releasing a breakdown of vote totals by plants. Unconfirmed results circulated on social media earlier in the evening had reported an even narrower margin of just 51 percent.

Workers should place absolutely zero trust in the USW's claims of ratification of the deal, which both company and union officials had made clear they wanted to pass. Time is critical: workers should organize at each plant over the next 24 hours to demand a recount of the vote. In order to ensure the result is legitimate and workers' democratic will has been truthfully represented, a recount must be overseen by groups of the most trusted, militant workers at each worksite.

Groups of workers to monitor a ballot recount,

organized independently of the USW, will lay the basis for a network of rank-and-file committees across the plants—in other words, organizations which are genuinely controlled by workers themselves, and not serving at the beck-and-call of management, as the USW has shown itself to be.

The regressive contract includes raises totaling just 20.5 percent over four years, an average of slightly more than 5 percent annually. Under conditions in which inflation is running at 8.5 percent a year, this would mean a substantial cut in workers' real income.

A worker at Arconic's Davenport Works in Riverside, Iowa told the *World Socialist Web Site* Wednesday night, “It's a loss due to the first year raises coming in lower than the average performance pay over the last 10 years. The other three years' worth of raises don't even cover current inflation. The \$4,000 ‘essential worker bonus’ is a f***ing joke along with no signing bonus.

“Our union is in bed with the company,” he continued. “F**k them, my dues will be pulled.”

In a Facebook group with nearly 1,000 workers created independently of the USW, workers already flooded the comments with demands for a recount Wednesday night and raised accusations of vote-rigging by the union.

“Need recount I call BS,” one wrote. Others commented: “The whole thing seemed fishy. During negotiations they were [nowhere] near a deal and then 24 hours later they had a tentative agreement. And now the contract passes with that close of a vote when there's so many people that didn't want it to.”

“Who counted the votes? Same people that does the PFP????,” another wrote, referring to Arconic’s Pay for Performance incentive pay scheme, which workers have said is often tilted in the company’s favor.

Another expressed their view that the union is beholden to the company, writing, “Steelworkers [Local] 105 is owned by Arconic.”

Evidently nervous over potential blowback from their members, USW Locals 105 in Iowa and 309 in Tennessee had not posted any announcement of the ratification on their Facebook pages as of this writing. Prior to the vote, the locals had disabled comments on many of their posts, in an effort to muzzle critical comments by workers.

Arconic’s management, for its part, voiced its satisfaction with the supposed passage of the deal, writing in a statement Wednesday night, “We are pleased that our USW represented employees at Arconic’s master contract locations ratified the agreement tonight.”

The USW’s attempts to push through a pro-corporate deal at Arconic, which would allow the company to reap increasing profits over the next four years, is fully in line with the union’s efforts to impose a concessionary agreement on 30,000 oil workers in recent months.

Just last weekend, the USW sabotaged and betrayed a two-month-long strike by 500 oil and gas workers at a Chevron refinery in the California Bay Area. Workers at the refinery had twice voted down a USW-endorsed local agreement before the union felt compelled to call a strike. However, the USW worked to isolate the struggle, refusing to call out any other plants, and late last week, called a snap vote on a contract even worse than the one workers had voted to reject.

A worker at the Chevron facility told the WSWS earlier on Wednesday, “The USW told the oil workers we had a good deal too. When a few refineries decided they didn’t care, the USW came to browbeat them back in line. More people need to stand up for what they believe in and not be swayed.”

Workers at Arconic have already taken the first steps to organize themselves independently, initiating a Facebook group which allowed them to share information across plants and campaign for demands which reflected their real interests in the run-up to the vote, including far higher wage increases.

The critical task facing workers now is to consolidate and build upon these initial steps. The WSWS will provide every assistance possible to workers in establishing rank-and-file committees to fight for demands that actually meet workers’ needs. Contact us today to discuss how to organize a committee at your plant.

We want to hear from you: What do you think of the contract, and the USW’s claims it was ratified? What are workers saying at your factory should be done? Fill out the form below:



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