

“Honestly, I don’t trust Arconic or our union”: Arconic workers continue to speak out against USW-company sellout

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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.

Anger and skepticism among Arconic aluminum workers continues to simmer after the United Steelworkers (USW) union declared that a pro-company contract had been ratified Wednesday night. There had been widespread opposition among workers in the run-up to the vote on the four-year agreement, which covers 3,400 hourly employees in Iowa, Indiana, Tennessee and New York.

The USW announced that the contract passed with 60 percent voting “yes” and 40 percent voting “no.” Workers have raised questions about the legitimacy of the vote totals and raised calls for a recount on social media. The USW had announced a tentative agreement less than 24 hours before the expiration of the previous contract. Workers in Iowa have stated that only limited “highlights” of the deal were distributed at union “informational” meetings.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is urging workers to organize independently of the USW, through the formation of rank-and-file committees, in order to carry forward the fight to secure workers’ needs.

Workers in Iowa: “The company doesn’t value our time or our health. We were censored by the USW.”

Opposition has been particularly high at the Davenport Works Arconic facility in Iowa, which accounts for 1,800 workers, or the majority covered by the agreement. According to an unofficial tally circulated by workers on Facebook, 54 percent at Davenport workers voted against the contract.

“If it was really 60-40 percent overall,” one Davenport Arconic worker said, “I think the company pissed off 40 percent of the workers. People aren’t going to fight for a company that doesn’t take care of them. If you screw the workers over, they’re not going to be in a hurry to do the job.”

The worker said the company should have given them more in wage increases. The USW-Arconic contract would give workers a 20.5 increase over the life of the contract, with a 7 percent raise in the first year, below the current rate of inflation, and 4.5 percent each of the remaining three years.

“If there was another 3-5 percentage point wage increase on the

initial, it would have been fair. But it was low. It was the first offer. We should have fought for a second offer. It’s not good enough. We should have got another 3-5 percent initial raise and paid vacation.

“Right now, if we have perfect attendance, we have earned time off or sick personal leave (SPL). We are not paid for those. We can earn them, but we are not paid for them. So if I get sick, I have to use my SPLs, and I’m lucky that I have them. But not everyone can come to work on time; they have kids, doctors’ appointments.

“With no Pay for Performance (PFP), there’s no need to get stuff done,” he added, speaking about an incentive scheme used by the company to maximize worker productivity and imposed by the union in previous contracts following concessions on wages. The PFP system was removed by the USW and Arconic under the current agreement but without raising base wages enough to adequately make up for it.

“I just don’t think this contract was enough. The company doesn’t value our time or our health. During this COVID pandemic, they wouldn’t pay workers to stay home. Those people lost a week and a half pay because of the company. This is a general industry thing—not just Arconic. The company doesn’t care as long as the machines are running. The company will set up a ‘committee’ and try to replace everyone. The company cheats about everything.

“From everything I’ve seen on business news, the Fed is taking a very active response to inflation, and it’s going to lead us into a recession. They’re definitely raising the interest rates. They’re gonna cause problems for us.”

Speaking of the role of the union, he added, “I don’t know the upper guys of the USW. But something shady is going on that they passed this contract. Or they’re corrupt.

“I don’t know who exactly was on the bargaining team,” he said. “But the company brought some big shots out of retirement. They brought people who knew what they were doing. These companies have billions of dollars at stake, why wouldn’t they bring in someone, pay a bunch of money to make it go in their favor?”

The Davenport worker also condemned the censorship carried out by the USW, with locals disabling comments on many of their Facebook posts prior to the vote. In response, workers created an independent Facebook group to organize discussion democratically without censorship by the company or the union.

“I think censorship is a big deal,” the worker said of the USW shutting down comments on social media in Davenport and across the country. “I don’t like censorship. I know a lot of people felt like me that they didn’t have a voice. People were making comments on USW

Local 105's Facebook page. There were a couple hundred comments, and you couldn't see any of them! We were censored by the USW, and I heard from others they were censored. I had enough of it. And over 900 some people in that new group didn't like it either."

"My gas bill has gone up for my vehicle. My grocery bills have gone up. Everything's gone up. And all I gain is an extra \$80 a week?"

Another Iowa worker who had previously worked at John Deere noted the similarities between the USW-Arconic collusion and the UAW-Deere contract sellout in 2015. "It seemed at Deere after the fact in 2015, when it went through, we found out some shady things that happened with our local president. He got a deal that said if he got the deal passed, he'd get to go to the UAW International. That happened then. This feels like 2015 all over again. That was a huge sellout then. It was crazy with all the BS that happened with the UAW corruption. It was nuts.

"Different company, different union, same exact feeling," he said of his anger at the vote outcome.

"With the company taking Pay for Performance away in this contract, it gives us no incentive to work. The 7 percent raise they're giving us doesn't even cover inflation right now. If they left PFP as it was, then we'd break even with inflation. My gas bill has gone up for my vehicle. My grocery bills have gone up. Everything's gone up. And all I gain is an extra \$80 a week? Well, this doesn't barely break even with just the last year and half of costs.

"With everything else the same, they adjusted the performance pay to be equal on all factory levels then it would have been a fair contract. But at Davenport Works, they're taking my pay away. Overall, I'm going to end up losing money. And in the long haul with inflation as it's going, with the following three years of 4.5 percent raises every year, it's still going to be under inflation.

"If inflation goes up to 25-28 percent, conservatively, over the life of the contract, we're not covering anything. Even if it went to 25 percent inflation, it would be a 4.5 percent loss.

"I don't trust the vote outcome. From everybody I talked to personally, people I talked to, all the union workers ...from everyone I talked to, to me it seemed like a 70-30 vote against the contract, compared to the 49-51 vote totals that came out initially. We need to have a recount. It needs to be done.

"The last contract I didn't care for either," he said of the previous USW-Arconic contract. "But inflation wasn't through the roof either. Arconic is charging customers more, but we're not going up at an equal pace. Even last quarter, Davenport Works, we didn't hit our performance pay. We got nothing in April. Then two weeks later, the performance pay report came out ... they had record profits. How can you say this was the best quarter since the split with Alcoa, and we don't get performance pay?"

With this contract, he said, "They're screwing over the vast majority of the people."

Alcoa, Tennessee: "Honestly, I don't trust Arconic or our union"

Workers at the Alcoa, Tennessee, facility, which has over 800 workers covered by contract, were highly skeptical of the vote outcome as well.

An Arconic worker in Alcoa suggested that the union and the company intimidated workers. "The people here in Tennessee were scared to vote the way they really wanted. I am not saying this was a horrible contract. However, it wasn't the best we could have gotten.

"I believe that every union brother and sister spends more time in the plants making Arconic their money than they do with their own families.

"Some get forced to work 64 hours a week while the big guys are at home eating dinner and enjoying their family time. Some of us pull multiple 16-hour shifts."

Another Arconic worker in Tennessee told the WSWS, "I absolutely believe that some underhanded crap went on. I'm not the only one that feels this way at Tennessee Operations. There is no way I believe the 'No' vote totals at our plant is correct. If four people were nominated to count, and they all were voting 'Yes,' you need four others that see it the other way to recount right after them. If the count was true, they shouldn't mind a recount or even a re-vote.

"Honestly, I don't trust Arconic or our union," he added. "The company doesn't abide by the contract anyway.

"I think there being so many new people here had a lot to do with the vote. New people get two weeks vacation now if they have been here between six months and three years. For the older guys like myself, the vacation didn't change. Our union heads act like this was a home run because our insurance didn't go up. Big deal!

"They have been screwing us on our Performance Pay for the last three years. We were making it consistently 14 percent, and then they raise the numbers up so high they are close to impossible to make even with a perfect quarter. There is no doubt we deserved more than we got.

"Whether our union just has no balls or they are in the company's back pocket, the results are the same. If they have nothing to hide, do a re-vote and have someone outside do the count. If the guys counting wanted a 'Yes,' I wouldn't be surprised if there was some miscounting going on."

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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