

“It was divide-and-conquer”: Arconic workers simmering in anger over sellout USW-company contract

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Arconic aluminum workers are simmering in anger and have engaged in slowdowns of production a week after the United Steelworkers (USW) claimed the ratification of a widely hated contract agreement covering workers in Iowa, Tennessee and Indiana by 60-40 percent.

The pro-company contract brought back by the USW amounts to a pay cut for Arconic workers, with a 7 percent raise in the first year followed by 4.5 percent in the following years, far below the present level of inflation rate of 8.3 percent. The USW also eliminated a Pay For Performance (PFP) incentive scheme which workers had grown to rely on after previous concessions by the union.

Prior to the vote, the USW censored its own Facebook pages by shutting off commenting, in a bid to keep workers from encouraging opposition to the USW-company contract. In response, Arconic workers took the initiative into their own hands to create a Facebook group to democratically and freely discuss their demands uncensored by the union. Informal polls taken by workers prior to the vote showed unanimous opposition to the deal on in the group, which included a substantial fraction of the total unionized workforce at Arconic.

Workers at Arconic must draw the lessons of this sellout. The USW bureaucracy responded to their determination to fight, expressed in a near-unanimous strike vote, by doubling down and working even more openly to force a sellout down their throats. This proves that Arconic workers need the means to organize and communicate among themselves independently of the union bureaucracy. This means the formation of a rank-and-file committee led by workers themselves and

uniting the workforce at every plant.

“Our production has slowed to a crawl”

“[Production is] still slow and [we are getting] no information,” said one worker in Davenport.

Another newer Arconic worker confirmed the slowdown as well. “Our production has slowed to a crawl,” he said. He also explained why many workers feel like they have no incentive to work harder for the company making billions in revenue.

“They took away our performance pay and signing bonus,” he said. “They gave us ‘essential workers’ bonus which is garbage and divided it into two installments of supposedly government money that didn’t cost them anything.

“People are pissed,” he added. “There’s no reason to push ourselves to produce weight anymore.”

The worker also concurred with other Arconic workers that newer workers were intimidated into voting for the contract by the union. He said, “The union leadership latched onto the new hires trying to get them to all vote ‘Yes’. I swayed quite a few to vote ‘No’ when I was able to make them understand what was going on. It was shady from the beginning. Davenport did have a majority ‘NO’ though.”

“It felt like the union leadership was working for the company. Made me sick to my stomach. I told my brothers and sisters to stay strong.”

“It was a divide-and-conquer by the company and the union”

A veteran Arconic worker in Davenport told the WSWS, “I’ve been at Arconic for 15 years at Davenport. Due to inflation and everything, the union and the company shorthanded us. What they were offering is way less than inflation, so we’ll be breaking even or losing money. With performance pay, it was fairer. The whole thing was a bait-and-switch tactic.

“We should have got PFP in April,” he added. “Well, basically, the way it was set up we were supposed to get performance pay based on the profitability of the company. The last couple of months we should have gotten at the end of January and especially April, we depended on the company to see if we qualified.

“But the company manipulated the numbers to not give us performance pay,” he said. “So the workers would say we were not getting anything anyway before the vote. In the future, the company is going to be very profitable and they won’t give us any of it.”

“I don’t think it was a fair vote either,” he said. “I was looking at the posts. I saw someone from Lafayette, Indiana, who said workers there assumed that the Davenport Works was OK with getting rid of performance pay to make way for wage increases.

“But that was not true...the contract got voted in because workers in Lafayette and Tennessee and Massena, New York — we weren’t able to talk to each other. The left hand didn’t know what the right hand was doing. It was a divide-and-conquer strategy by the company and the union. It was underhanded.

“The company also bribed the new employees with two weeks vacation and the company was pandering to them. It was underhanded. They were basically trying to bribe workers to get the contract to pass.

“The union was not going to fight for us. I’m embarrassed they came back with that offer. It was a bad offer. I’m pretty sure they got some perks for the company to push it through. The whole vote is scandalized forever if they didn’t give the other workers who didn’t get a chance to vote as well,” he said of many workers who were not able to vote.

“The union is the one that agreed to the contract with the company. They *wanted* this contract. It should have been a separate party to examine the votes. I’m for a

democratic system. If everyone actually voted and we know how it went, I’d be okay. But there are so many red flags in the vote there that it’s impossible to say this is a just system!”



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