

Vote No! Reject the concessions contract at ATI

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Are you a steelworker at ATI or another company? Fill out the form at the end of this article to join the fight to build rank-and-file committees.

After the overwhelming rejection vote against one concessions contract, the United Steelworkers (USW) bureaucracy is seeking to push through a second, largely unchanged, contract for the 1,000 steelworkers at ATI, formerly Allegheny Technologies Incorporated.

Workers at ATI should reject this latest attempt to push through a concessions contract. They should make this the beginning of a struggle to organize independently of the bureaucracy, and mount the struggle for jobs and the restoration of wages and benefits that have been cut over the past decade.

The United Steelworkers bureaucracy is seeking to prevent a strike at all costs against ATI as it seeks to curry favors from the Trump administration. ATI has become a major supplier of specialty steel for the aerospace and military industries and the USW bureaucracy does not want to see that interrupted with a strike.

The United Steelworkers has long been a supporter and promoter of tariffs, along with nationalism and chauvinism, as it seeks to divide workers in the United States from their class brothers and sisters throughout the world.

The USW bureaucracy hopes that the tariffs will boost corporate profits and bolster their role as a second layer of management for the companies.

Last month, workers overwhelmingly voted down the first tentative contract that USW officials tried to push through. As during the push to pass the previous concessions contract, the USW is not presenting workers with the full contract or providing enough time to study its details. Instead, at hastily called meetings, workers are being given a “summary” of cherry-picked highlights. Voting is set to take place this Tuesday.

“They moved a few things around,” was how one steelworker described the new contract as he was leaving the union meeting Thursday afternoon.

“There’s not much new,” he added. “They’ve just repackaged what we’ve already rejected. It’s like the union is pushing these concessions.”

The first concessions agreement was announced on February 28, just hours before the expiration of the previous four-year contract, heading off a potential strike.

Workers overwhelmingly voted down that contract, expressing

outrage that the deal did not restore the massive concessions given up in 2015 and 2021.

At the time, USW officials announced that there would be no bargaining until April 14. In presenting the new sellout, USW officials have not explained how it is possible to have reached a new contract with no more than one day of bargaining.

Steelworkers were informed of the new contract through a text message sent April 15. They were told that union meetings would be held that Thursday, with voting taking place the following week.

“USW: We reached a tentative agreement with ATI. Informational meetings will be on Thursday, April 17. Ratification vote will be on Tuesday, April 22. See your local for times. Thank you for your solidarity!” the text message read.

Details of the six-year deal, which will cover workers at ATI’s unionized factories in Pennsylvania, Ohio and western New York, have not been released. It is even questionable if a final contract actually exists. Instead, it is likely the USW bureaucracy has merely agreed on a framework whose details may be negotiated over the coming months.

At the union meetings held on Thursday, workers were not given the details of the contract. Instead, they were presented with a brief summary of what the union is describing as the contract highlights.

“I would like to see the whole contract,” said another worker as he was leaving the union meeting. “We’ve given up so much over the past 10 years, it is time that we get it back.”

While ATI has been reporting record profits and its stock value has skyrocketed, steelworkers under the terms of the previous USW-backed deal have seen their wages eaten up by inflation, out-of-pocket health costs rise for fewer benefits and pension benefits reduced. None of these issues will be addressed in any meaningful way in the current contract proposals.

Over the past 12 years, workers at ATI have only received a 9 percent pay increase. During the same time, inflation according to the government has gone up by nearly 40 percent. In reality, prices for the working class have grown at a much higher rate.

The settlement will cement in place the loss of over 1,000 jobs over the past decade.

The extended contract term—six years—is itself a clear indication that the USW and ATI are seeking to lock in a new round of concessions, changes in work rules and more job cuts.

Allegheny Technologies is a specialty steel manufacturer formerly based in Pittsburgh and now in Texas. During the past

decade, the company has increased production for the aerospace and military industries and reduced its capacity for specialty steels used in tools, machine parts and electric transmissions.

The overriding concern of the USW bureaucracy is to prevent a walkout by rank-and-file workers and a repeat of the protracted lockouts and strikes in 2015-16 and 2021, which USW officials ultimately sold out.

In 2015-16, ATI workers were engaged in a bitter seven-month-long lockout. Despite widespread sentiment among rank-and-file steelworkers for extending the strike, the USW isolated the locked-out steelworkers and rammed through a contract that cut health care, pensions and retirement benefits.

It also allowed ATI to slash over 800 jobs—going from 2,200 workers to 1,300—as it began the process of moving away from its traditional production of specialty steel towards production for the aerospace and military industries.

In 2021, steelworkers struck for over three months and again were left isolated by the United Steelworkers bureaucracy and forced to take more concessions along with the cutting of 300 additional jobs.

In justifying both sets of concessions, the USW claimed that the cuts were necessary to “save” the company and that once the company rebounded, it would restore the lost benefits and wages.

Rank-and-file ATI workers must take the conduct of this struggle into their own hands by building a rank-and-file committee to organize the defeat of this sellout contract. Before any ratification vote workers must have the full contract and sufficient time to study and discuss it. The rank-and-file committee, made up of the most trusted and militant workers, must oversee the conduct of any vote and tabulation to ensure its integrity.

Decades of bitter experience has proven that the USW bureaucracy does not represent the interests of steelworkers at ATI or for that matter the workers at any of the other steelmakers. Over the past five decades, while more than 300,000 steelworkers have lost their jobs, the assets of the USW bureaucracy have risen to almost \$2 billion, according to the union’s most recent filing with the US Labor Department.

Economic nationalism and chauvinism

Central to the union bureaucracy’s collusion with management has been the ceaseless promotion of economic nationalism and chauvinism. For decades, while US Steel shut down mills and laid off steelworkers—and other companies such as Bethlehem, LTV, National and Republic went bankrupt, eliminating jobs, pensions and healthcare—the USW worked to direct the anger of US steelworkers over these attacks against brother steelworkers of Japan, Korea and Brazil.

Like the United Auto Workers, Teamsters and other unions, the USW bureaucracy is supporting Trump’s tariffs on steel and aluminum with the lie that these tariffs will protect steelworkers’ jobs. This provides the fascist president, who is attacking

immigrants, firing hundreds of thousands of federal workers and gutting essential social programs, with a cover for his war against the world and the working class at home.

Secondly, the union bureaucracy is attracted to Trump’s gangster-like and fascist methods. The USW bureaucracy has long used anti-democratic methods to suppress opposition to their sellouts and prevent a movement of the rank and file. They realize that they will need to deepen their attacks and establish a dictatorship over their membership to impose continued concessions and job cuts.

Workers cannot wage a successful struggle based on the nationalist and pro-capitalist program advanced by the USW.

Production is a global process. Manufactured goods and resources are the product of the combined labor of workers in many countries. Cars, computers, phones, along with steel, aluminum and other basic materials, are the products of the labor of workers across national borders and often continents.

The idea that manufacturing can be “rolled back” to a time when it was based in a single nation would represent an enormous step back for humanity. It is the capitalist nation-state system that holds humanity back and is turning to trade war and ultimately world war.

A real fight in defense of jobs anywhere in the world requires the international unity of the working class on the basis of a common strategy. Only through global actions can the working class face off against ATI, US Steel, Cleveland Cliffs, Nippon Steel and their wealthy shareholders, who are waging a war for profits and market-share all over the world.

Workers must reject the slogan of “America First” in favor of the slogan “Workers of the World Unite!” The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is fighting to build a world movement in opposition to the nationalist poison promoted by corporate politicians and union bureaucrats in every country.

To join the fight for rank-and-file power, fill out the form below.



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