

Cleveland-Cliffs announces mill and mine closures, impacting over 2,000 workers across 4 states

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

Steel manufacturing giant Cleveland-Cliffs has announced it will idle multiple steel plants and iron ore mines, affecting thousands of workers across Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan and Minnesota. The company cites weak demand, financial losses and shifting trade policies as reasons for the closures.

The layoffs are the latest in a string of industrial layoffs in auto, manufacturing and logistics, as companies carry out massive job cuts to realign their business as part of Trumps trade war.

Workers can only oppose these closures and job cuts through the organization of rank-and-file committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) which seeks to unite workers throughout the world in struggle against the global corporate elite, their political henchmen and sellout union bureaucrats.

Last week, Cleveland-Cliffs reported first-quarter 2025 financial results showing a net loss of \$495 million, significantly wider than the \$67 million loss in the same period last year. The company's revenues fell to \$4.63 billion, missing analyst expectations of \$4.64 billion. Steel prices were down 17 percent year-over-year.

In a statement CEO Lourenco Goncalves acknowledged that lower steel index prices and what he called underperforming "non-core" assets drove the heavy loses, and claimed a need to streamline operations to focus on its core automotive steel market.

Steel demand has fallen as both manufacturing and construction has cut back since the announcement of the 25 percent across-the-board tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. In response to the tariffs, manufacturers and importers increased shipments before they were implemented and are now utilizing those inventories.

Cleveland-Cliffs is shifting most of its production to provide for the auto industry, betting that the tariffs will increase demand for the light weight steel used in the auto industry.

The United Steelworkers, representing most of the affected workers, is collaborating with Cleveland-Cliffs as it undertakes industry realignment, focusing on preventing steelworkers' opposition to the layoffs from developing into an open struggle against the steelmaker.

Impact of the cuts

The layoffs will have a devastating impact on the workers, their families and the communities in which they live.

The Steelton rail mill was the first rail mill in the United States and dates back to the Civil War, with construction beginning in 1865. It began producing steel in 1867. Today, it is one of only three rail mills in the United States.

The Conshohocken mill dates back even further, having opened in 1826 near Wilmington, Delaware before moving to Conshohocken in the 1850s. It played a major role in the industrial development of eastern Pennsylvania.

The Dearborn works will continue to employ about 500 steelworkers in finishing. The Hibbing Taconite mine may reopen once iron ore pellet stockpiles are depleted, but no date is set.

In addition, Cleveland-Cliffs said it would halt plans for a transformer plant in Weirton, West Virginia. The project, initially proposed as a \$200 million investment, was expected to create over 600 jobs in the region.

Last year, Cleveland-Cliffs ended operations at its Weirton tinplate production facility, resulting in the layoff of over 950 workers. Many of the laid off workers hoped that they would get rehired at the new transformer plant.

The closing of the mills represents a significant change for Cleveland-Cliffs, from a steel manufacturer that produced a wide range of products to a company concentrating mainly on the auto industry.

While betting on the auto industry, the company's first-quarter net loss is also attributed to the slowdown in domestic car manufacturing, also as a result of tariffs as well as lower than expected demand for electric vehicles.

Cleveland-Cliffs has also faced challenges in managing its debt obligations, further straining its financial position.

Cleveland-Cliffs plays a major role in US steel production as the largest flat-rolled steel producer in North America. The company operates fully integrated steel mills across multiple states, including Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and North Carolina, with an annual production capacity of approximately 23 million net tons of raw steel.

Cleveland-Cliffs also manages iron ore mines in Minnesota and Michigan, producing iron ore pellets that are essential for steelmaking. The company also operates hot-briquetted iron (HBI) facilities, which provide an alternative feedstock for electric arc furnaces, enabling the production of higher-value steel grades.

Recently, Cleveland-Cliffs has been involved in discussions about

potential acquisitions, including a joint bid with Nucor to acquire U.S. Steel, following the White House's decision to block Nippon Steel's takeover attempt.

The closures will have wide-ranging devastating effects on local economies, from job losses to declining business activity. All the areas have a higher unemployment rate than the national average and all but Conshohocken, PA have a poverty rate of 20 percent or greater.

Silence from the USW

Cleveland-Cliffs, along with U.S. Steel are the two major steelmakers whose employees are represented by the United Steelworkers (USW). But the USW has not even commented on nor issued a press release about the Cleveland-Cliffs layoffs. This is not an oversight. The USW is an active partner with Cleveland-Cliffs, supporting their reorganization plan and working to prevent the mobilization of steelworkers against the companies.

Since 2020, when the company's purchase of AK Steel and ArcelorMittal made it the largest producer of flat roll steel in North America, the USW bureaucracy has pushed through concessions contracts and accepted the cutting of thousands of jobs.

Over the past year and a half, the USW along with Cleveland-Cliffs management has worked hand in hand to block the proposed purchase of U.S. Steel by Japanese-based Nippon Steel for \$14.9 billion on "America First" grounds. The bureaucracy blames "foreign" competition for job losses even as it has worked with American corporations to impose mass layoffs.

Just last month, the USW pushed through a third concessions contract at ATI, formally Allegheny Technologies—a major producer of special steel for the military and aerospace industries—in hopes of winning favor from the Trump administration.

The USW is one of several major unions who have openly backed the would-be dictator Trump's trade war measures. On April 2, when Trump announced his sweeping tariffs on the rest of the world, USW President David McCall declared his support for the tariffs, calling upon the Trump administration to go further in his "America First" agenda.

"Our union has been fighting on the front lines for fair trade for decades as flawed trade agreements and other policies robbed workers of their jobs and deprived our nation of critical capabilities across key sectors," McCall wrote.

McCall went on: "We welcome the administration's commitment to fair trade and encourage President Trump to consider a broader strategy that will level the playing field and promote widespread economic growth."

With this statement, the USW bureaucracy declares its support for a policy which will not only lead to mass job losses, but is part of the American ruling class' preparations for new wars, especially against China, which would lead to massive deaths.

History of betrayals

To defend jobs and livelihoods, steelworkers must learn from five

decades of betrayal by the United Steelworkers bureaucracy in their fight against Cleveland-Cliffs.

During the 1980s and 1990s, as the US steel industry underwent reorganization and consolidation, the USW collaborated with companies to reduce the workforce by hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Amid deindustrialization in cities such as Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Cleveland, Youngstown, Gary, Indiana and Chicago, the United Steelworkers diligently worked to prevent steelworkers from concluding that it was imperative to unite with workers internationally to combat the vast multinational corporations.

Instead, the union attempted to shift the blame for layoffs and unemployment onto steelworkers from Japan, South Korea and Brazil. This set up a global race to the bottom, enabling these companies to pit workers from different countries against each other as they developed a global production process.

Now, the USW is working with the fascist Trump administration in their trade war against China. The aim today is to prepare the working class for war.

In an opinion piece published in *Newsweek*, *Economic Nationalism Divides Us: World Socialism Is the Answer*, Will Lehman, a Mack Trucks worker and former candidate for UAW president, who is a leading member of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) opposing the nationalism of the United Auto Workers, wrote:

Nationalism subordinates the working class to the profit interests of the capitalist class. This is the same poison used by Trump to attack immigrants, and its logic is war and the sacrifice of workers and their children for the interests of the rich.

Workers in the US must reject the lie that we can only save our jobs at the expense of workers in other countries. We can only defend our interests by uniting with our class brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Stopping the Cleveland-Cliffs shutdowns require that workers unite globally with steelworkers and others who are fighting the same global corporate elite, rather than siding with management against "foreign" workers. To accomplish this, workers should form a rank-and-file committee to fight against management, the USW's collusion and the corporate-controlled political setup.

Autoworkers, educators, healthcare workers and others have already formed such committees and are working to coordinate their struggles across the country and internationally through a world movement, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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