

Health before profits: West Lafayette, Indiana residents fight SK hynix microchip plant

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A group of residents of West Lafayette, Indiana, are campaigning against the construction of an SK hynix microchip plant and the rezoning of their residential neighborhood for heavy industry. They have organized under the banner “STOP Heavy Industry in Our Neighborhoods” to oppose the efforts of the City Council and Purdue University to push through the project.

In their petition, they declare:

“THIS FIGHT IS NOT OVER. West Lafayette City Council has prioritized corporate interests, ignored well-documented facts, and failed to represent their constituents. We do not accept this.”

The petition continues:

“On May 5, 2025, City Council voted against their own constituents, rezoning land owned by the Purdue Research Foundation (PRF) from residential to heavy industrial use. This cleared the way for SK hynix, a giant South Korean semiconductor manufacturer, to build a massive facility on PRF land surrounded by densely populated neighborhoods. We do not accept this.”

They pointed to the relationship between City Council officials and Purdue University, accusing them of conspiring against city residents. They cited a statement by the council and Purdue administrators claiming the rezoning of the residential neighborhoods would have “no adverse health effects.” With only one exception, all signatories had no training in public health, environmental science, toxicology or chemical safety. Instead, they were closely tied to the semiconductor industry.

One signatory, Mark Lundstrom—Purdue’s Chief Semiconductor Officer, acting as a liaison between the university and SK hynix—has openly supported the rezoning. Residents have taken a principled stance, exposing the role of political and academic institutions in deliberately ignoring the documented risks of cancer and other illnesses among workers. PFAs, polyfluoroalkyl substances, are synthetic chemicals, that are water- and heat-resistant. Known for their usage in nonstick cookware and food packaging, they are unable to break down naturally. In the case of Teflon, it

can cause life-threatening illnesses.

Reports sent anonymously to the *World Socialist Web Site* also allege that Purdue officials threatened workers’ jobs—and even their immigration status—if they opposed the SK hynix project publicly.

Two residents who spoke to WSWS, using pseudonyms, described widespread distrust of officials.

“One perspective is the lack of transparency from local and state officials,” Angela said. Not many people are covering this story. We have to connect the dots between the military buildup and what we as citizens need to do to inform everyone. They have plans to place industry at the service of the military for another nuclear arms race.”

Vicky added, “The Indiana Economic Development Corporation is rezoning land for tax purposes in the interest of these companies. It’s frightening to the connection between the agenda of the City Council and Purdue. Is this the community I want to raise a family in?”

She continued: “Local concerns and scientific concerns were dismissed. You would think with the Democrats on the City Council and liberal Purdue they would protect us. They ignored the scientific warning about the effects of PFAs and other air pollutants. Even the City Council ran on science and reform! The council said that they had to ‘protect ourselves,’ for another economic crisis and ‘bring jobs.’ Even the Purdue president publicly acknowledged that the partnership would ‘move forward with leading industry partners.’”

Universities and military production

This local fight is tied to broader US war preparations. Since 2023, universities have been enlisted in military research, particularly in semiconductors, which are vital for weapons and global technological dominance. The 2022 CHIPS and Science Act, enacted under the Biden

administration, provided \$280 billion to US semiconductor companies for research and production aimed at “onshoring” chip production. This nationalist program has accelerated under Trump 2.0. At the heart of the building of SK hynix and the harnessing of the universities to the US war drive is the nationalist “fortress America” program of all factions of the US ruling class.

Purdue is among more than 40 universities in the Scalable Asymmetric Lifecycle Engagement (SCALE) program. According to its website, SCALE aims to “develop a microelectronics workforce that is well prepared to meet the needs of the Department of Defense and the Defense Industrial Base.”

As the WSWS has noted, “These war projects at the universities are discussed and negotiated by university administrations and privileged, pro-war layers of the professoriate behind the backs of students and the overwhelming majority of academic workers. No doubt most students would oppose these pro-war machinations of the university administration if they knew about them and understood their political significance.”

In April 2024, SK hynix announced a \$3.87 billion investment in a packaging and R&D facility for AI-related semiconductor production, with full backing from Indiana state officials, Purdue University and the US government. Former Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb called the project a step forward for “U.S. innovation and national security,” while SK hynix received \$458 million in direct federal funding through the CHIPS Act.

The initiative, part of “Project Neuron,” includes \$34.5 billion in investments across 21 states for semiconductor, battery, and biopharmaceutical plants. With NVIDIA—the largest buyer of SK hynix memory chips—accounting for 16 percent of sales. Much of the production is tied to AI systems with direct military applications.

The US ruling elite sees the development of AI as central to its war aims. The development of DeepSeek by China is a major political concern of the Trump administration, which is focused on ensuring American global economic dominance above all against China.

This is being paid for by siphoning off the wealth generated by the working class into the coffers of the war profiteers and Wall Street. Since 2019, CEO pay has risen by 34.7 percent.

In the process, all concern for the health and safety of workers is being discarded. This has included the gutting of regulatory bodies like the Environmental Protection Agency and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The recent explosion of the US Steel coke processing plant in Clairton, Pennsylvania is a recent tragic example of the dangers to which individual workers and whole communities

are being subjected.

Opposition must broaden

The fight in West Lafayette is part of a larger struggle. Workers at GE Aerospace in Cincinnati have been on strike since August 28, resisting demands for concessions by a company that produces weapons for the US, Israel and Ukraine. Last year 30,000 civilian Boeing workers in Seattle struck, and currently 3,200 St. Louis Boeing military workers are striking. Similar struggles have taken place at Allison Transmission and Rolls-Royce in Indiana, both major military suppliers. These workers are in conflict the same corporate-military machine that confronts West Lafayette residents.

On the other hand, the various trade union bureaucracies have lined up behind the militarization of US society and sought to isolate and betray workers’ struggles against the defense industry giants. United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain has supported Trump’s trade war policies and offered the services of the UAW to expand military production, referencing the “arsenal of democracy” propaganda slogan from WWII. At General Electric in St. Louis, the International Association of Machinists bureaucracy fearful of the ongoing strike expanding into a wider struggle that would hinder the military plans of the US government, has even called on the Trump administration to intervene.

The campaign against construction of the SK hynix plant must be connected to these struggles. Residents and students alike can only defend their health, communities and future by uniting with the working class against corporate, academic and political institutions who represent the ruling class. Residents of West Lafayette must take their demands throughout Indiana and broadly and develop neighborhood committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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