Reject the USW's Cleveland-Cliffs deal! Unite steelworkers in a common fight at Cliffs and US Steel!

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Steelworkers at Cleveland-Cliffs and US Steel should fill out the form at the end of this article to build rank-and-file committees, reject the USW's betrayal at Cliffs and organize a unified fight with steelworkers at US Steel, striking National Steel Car workers in Canada and locked-out oil workers in Whiting, Indiana and Martinez, California.

The United Steelworkers' tentative agreements at Cleveland-Cliffs, announced earlier this month, are a betrayal of steelworkers. The USW has long abandoned the slogan "No Contract, No Work." After keeping workers at both companies on the job beyond the September 1 contract expiration, the bureaucracy is seeking a separate settlement with Cliffs that would leave workers at US Steel to face management alone.

The Cliffs announcements cover approximately 10,000 steel mill workers and another 3,000 iron ore workers. USW officials are campaigning for approval with vague promises while leaving the essentials unexplained. Workers have the right to see the full contract, all side agreements and letters of understanding, and to be given enough time to read, study and discuss the contract before having to vote on it.

Lourenco Goncalves, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Cleveland-Cliffs, praised the deal, saying, it would give the company "the stability we need to invest, compete and continue strengthening American steelmaking." The CEO who pocketed nearly $19 million in salaries and perks in 2025, added that corporate management "greatly value our partnership with the USW and its leadership."

At US Steel, negotiations remain secret. Talks were scheduled to resume this past Friday, but workers are not being told what was in the last proposal presented by the union.

USW negotiator and District 10 Director Bernie Hall told Bloomberg on November 9 that continuing talks into 2027 was "highly unlikely." This is an admission of the bankruptcy of the USW bureaucracy's policy of continually extending negotiations. His statements also raised the prospect of a strike. Under conditions in which the USW is seeking to push Cliffs workers to accept the tentative agreement, this course would leave US Steel workers isolated in any strike.

The answer to this division is a common fight organized independently of the bureaucracy. Rank-and-file committees must establish direct links among the mills and mines to prepare coordinated action across company and national lines.

What the USW leaves out

The USW announcement provides only selective highlights while leaving the details of the contract hidden.

On wages, the proposal includes a four-year schedule of 5, 4, 4 and 5 percent, plus a $4,000 payment in January. After years in which higher prices have chewed up previous raises, the new proposals amount to a negligible increase in real wages under the present 3.7 percent rate of inflation. The USW says it has updated an inflation clause but does not disclose its wording.

The TA also boasts of premium-free insurance without detailing changes to the plan that could reduce coverage or increase workers' costs. Cliffs entered negotiations demanding healthcare concessions. Deductibles, coinsurance, prescription charges, coverage restrictions and out-of-pocket limits determine what comes out of the family budget. Workers need the full benefit schedules to see what the company secured.

While claiming an increase in the formula used to calculate active employees' future pensions, the announcement identifies no increase for current retirees. Those living on fixed incomes face rising grocery, utility and medical bills. Retirees need an explicit benefit increase, and active workers need the actual rates and eligibility rules.

The USW's own coverage figures expose the hollowness of its job-security assurances. It now reports roughly 10,000 steelworkers covered, compared with 12,000 in the 2022 Cliffs settlement. The 2018 agreements with predecessor ArcelorMittal USA covered roughly 15,000. Although ownership and bargaining coverage have changed, the smaller workforce reported today belies the promises of secure employment.

The 2022 deal was also promoted with a $4 billion investment pledge and promises of more secure jobs. In 2024, Cliffs closed Weirton's tinplate mill, eliminating 950 jobs.

The only job security the bureaucracy defends is its own position as management's recognized partner, paid off through company-funded joint programs. Workers' jobs remain subject to corporate

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profit calculations.

Two deaths, and more talk of “partnership”

Two workers died at Cliffs facilities during the negotiations. On August 13, Jonathan Stepp, 28, was killed operating a pot hauler at Burns Harbor, Indiana. A young father, he worked for contractor Phoenix Services and belonged to International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150.

On September 27, Jeffrey Smith, 53, of Newell, Pennsylvania, was killed at the Monessen mill after being pinned between two door machines. Authorities announced an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) investigation. His family and coworkers deserve a full account of the equipment, protective systems and work procedures involved.

The USW apparatus said nothing about either worker in its announcement of the tentative agreement. Instead, USW District 10 Director Bernie Hall issued a statement after Smith’s death pledging to work with management and authorities.

The USW remains embedded in a company-funded partnership. As the WSWS reported in October, officials attended a joint safety conference in Ohio with management responsible for union participants’ earnings and expenses. The USW’s announcement promises increased funding for the joint career-development program while leaving the new safety provisions undisclosed.

Workers need independent safety committees, controlled by the rank and file, and the power to stop unsafe production without retaliation or loss of pay. A safety program that leaves the final decision with management leaves workers’ lives subordinate to production.

The miners face the same problem of selective disclosure. Their separate TA announcement supplies no wage schedule or detailed benefit terms. They are being assured of a fair settlement without the information needed to judge it. Miners and steelworkers must exchange the agreements and organize together against attempts to play one workforce against another.

Unite the struggles and prepare a fight

While workers face pressure to accept inadequate wages, benefits and safety protections, Cleveland-Cliffs and US Steel’s owner Nippon Steel are reporting substantial profits. Cliffs’ third-quarter results record $165 million in net income, compared with a $134 million loss the preceding quarter. In the same release, management defended indefinitely idling Stelco’s galvanizing lines in Canada.

Nippon Steel’s November 5 results presentation reports approximately $627 million in underlying business profit for US Steel, including its Slovak operations, in the first half of fiscal 2026. It raised the full-year forecast to at least $1.46 billion, from approximately $1.14 billion. These figures represent underlying business profit, not net income. Management expects US Steel to be a major source of group earnings and future growth.

At the same time as the USW bureaucracy tries to ram through these pro-company agreements it is isolating 800 BP Whiting oil refinery workers who have been locked out from the Chicago area facility since March. Marathon workers in Martinez, California are also locked out following their struggle over staffing and safety.

The refinery corporations are reporting enormous earnings. BP reported third-quarter profit attributable to shareholders of $4.7 billion, against $1.2 billion a year earlier. Marathon Petroleum reported $7.4 billion in third-quarter net income attributable to the company, against $1.4 billion a year earlier, with $3.3 billion returned to shareholders.

To win substantial gains the rank-and-file must prepare an all-out struggle against the steel and energy bosses. The bureaucracy has worked to prevent such a confrontation. Its conduct expresses its role as an agent of corporate interests within the workforce: defending the partnership with management against workers’ independent action.

The USW’s economic nationalism serves the same purpose. Trade war encourages workers to identify their interests with domestic employers and regard workers abroad as competitors. Yet Canadian and American and for that matter Japanese and Chinse steelworkers face decisions by the same global corporations. Their allies are one another, together with steelworkers internationally.

In Hamilton, Ontario, the National Steel Car Rank-and-File Committee has advanced the alternative, including demanding full disclosure of proposals, mass meetings deciding strategy and direct appeals for common action across North America.

Steelworkers should build such committees at every mill, coke plant and mine. These committees will fight for substantial wage increases and full COLA; healthcare without cost shifting; adequate pensions for active workers and current retirees; enforceable staffing and rest requirements; protection against layoffs and contracting out; and workers’ control over safety.

They will establish direct links among steelworkers at Cleveland-Cliffs and US Steel workers, miners, refinery workers and workers across national borders, preparing coordinated action independently of the bureaucracy. A “no” vote must be the starting point for taking control of the struggle.

Fill out the form below for information on building these committees and how to organize the fight.



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