



INFORMATION UPDATE #35

October 3, 2011

Workers Outraged at U.S. Steel's Refusal to Negotiate in Good Faith



Well over 1,000 active members of Local 1005 and retirees filled the hall where the September 29 Information Meeting on the status of contract talks with U.S. Steel was held. They received a report on the latest developments from President Rolf Gerstenberger, with additional presentations by other members of the Local's Negotiating Committee Jake Lombardo, Tony McLaughlin and Gary Howe.

The workers applauded the Negotiating Committee's rejection of the company's refusal to negotiate and the union's refusal to dignify the company's arrogant demand

for an answer to what it called its "offer" with a response.

The meeting expressed what can only be called universal outrage at the company's refusal to negotiate and to the slave clause it arrogantly expected the workers to endorse with open arms. Not one worker got up to say they could support this offensive deal, let alone the attempt to shove it down their throats. The view repeatedly expressed was that the union should not dignify this "full and final offer" with a vote while another view said that it could be voted on so as to turn it down one hundred percent!

Misleading Talk about "Final Offers" and "Walking Out of Negotiations"

News reports on the state of contract talks between Local 1005 USW and U.S. Steel have it all wrong and totally miss the point when they write that Local 1005 walked out of contract negotiations with U.S. Steel. In an article entitled "Union walks out on steely talks," *Spec* journalist Steve "Benedict" Arnold writes: "Local 1005 negotiators walked out of talks seeking an end to the bitter 10-month lockout at U.S. Steel." The article takes its cue from the letter U.S. Steel sent out to all employees. U.S. Steel declares that "Their [the Union's] actions made it clear that a negotiated end to the labour dispute is not in sight." To confirm the statement, Benedict quotes the spokesperson for U.S. Steel Canada, Trevor Harris. "Trevor Harris confirmed that the union walked out of the Friday negotiations," Benedict intones.

The media also have it all wrong when they quote the company saying it made a final offer. The *Spec* article quotes U.S. Steel's September 23 letter to employees which states, "The Company made a final proposal for a new collective agreement to your Union leadership." The *Spec*

article repeats the company line that the "final offer" is "more than fair given Hamilton's performance and the significant challenges ahead."

This is all silly talk. First of all the company has never made any offer. It has dictated terms and dictated the choices the union has – accept, reject, stay neutral. To call this "an offer," final or otherwise, good or bad, is to be totally contemptuous of language because it was not an "offer." To speak of this dictate as an "offer" is also to confound the very conception of what constitutes negotiations or the meaning of a process of "labour relations."

Since last July, the company has refused to negotiate. It has presented fiats. In November it demanded the Union take this fiat to a vote and declared that refusal to do so showed the Union leadership was on an ideological crusade. Now, eleven months later, the Company has degenerated further. It has presented a new fiat and given the union the choice to accept it, reject it or stay neutral!!!

Why do the media persist in repeating the Company .../ 2

propaganda by calling these fiats "offers" and saying the Union walked out of negotiations? This failure of the media to tell the truth and discern fact from fiction is really unfortunate since it merely serves to lower their prestige. Their reporting, besides giving a general impression that things are not going well between Local 1005 and U.S. Steel, fails to even bring out the relevant facts.

Firstly, if the term "final offer" is to be used, then the question comes how do you walk out of negotiations AFTER a "final offer" has been presented to you? What negotiations are you walking out of?

Secondly, to suggest that U.S. Steel has any labour relations with Local 1005 is also silly talk unless, of course, attempts to establish a slave/master relationship are to be called labour relations! Far from there being any "labour relations," there is a company attempt to establish its dictatorship and a union refusal to accept such a thing. Either the company negotiates in good faith and recognizes the union as an equal partner in negotiations, or the company will continue to flap its gums in the wind.

It is truly unfortunate that this creates a situation in which

everyone else has to suffer which is why active and retired members organized by Local 1005 are trying to address what to do about that. Even the media had to acknowledge that workers were outraged by the Company's refusal to negotiate and that if their fiat went to a vote it would be defeated 100 per cent.

However, the very idea that a non-negotiated fiat should be put to a vote is itself a crazy company fantasy. Union members are not as eager to establish master/slave relations at Hamilton Works as is U.S. Steel!

We seriously propose that the media learn what reporting is all about instead of becoming a part of U.S. Steel's disinformation campaign. The union did not walk out on any negotiations because there were no negotiations. It refused to succumb to yet another of U.S. Steel's attempts to impose a dictatorship at Hamilton Works. Nothing good will come out of conciliating with U.S. Steel's arrogant treatment of Canadian steelworkers and their community.

As we said, we think it is high time the media did their homework and stopped reporting things in a manner that makes no sense.

What the Workers Had to Say

"We definitely shouldn't take this to a vote, it would acknowledge it as a legitimate contract offer by the company."

"It is an insult."

"U.S. Steel has shown once again that they have no interest in negotiating."

"The union moved off of their two main positions in the interest of getting a deal that it could recommend. How did US Steel respond? It thought it could kick us in the teeth. Well, think again U.S. Steel."

"We challenged U.S. Steel to negotiate once we gave up on the indexing and the DB plan for new hires. They just humoured us and then handed us a final offer that they had with them before the negotiating session even began. What a laugh!"

"I personally am one of the so-called un-slots, along with some 300 others. We are to be given the pleasure of working for 26 weeks at a Level Two pay scale, in my case down from a Level Five, in the case of others down from a Level Four, and during that time I am to do whatever the company says without any union protection whatsoever. If I don't jump high enough or quick enough, then I won't get the overtime I will require to get EI after the 26 weeks. Who are we kidding here?"

"It is one thing to see these incredibly ugly and incredibly wealthy American businessmen think they can lord it over us like this, but for their Canadian lawyer to act as their stooge is really beyond belief."

"The way this slave clause is written we can expect two-tier wages before you know it."

"I never thought I would see the day when some foreign company could come here and try to turn Hamilton Works into a Walmart. 'Show a good attitude Walmart style or I won't give you overtime and you won't get enough hours to qualify for EI.' 'Smile for the camera now! My, I don't think you did that nicely enough. Now, try again. Oh, too bad, you won't get any overtime now. You have only yourself to blame, you know. You should have smiled nicely when I told you to.'"

"I think that U.S. Steel actually thought we would all jump for glee when we received their slavery clause. It is hard to fathom what world they think they live in."

U.S. Steel's Intransigence Extends to 2010 Actuarial Report of Local's Pension Plan

Believe it or not ... U.S. Steel's intransigence extends to now refusing to give Local 1005 USW the 2010 Actuarial Report. You can't get more petty than that.

Ever since 1997 when Local 1005 became aware that Stelco had filed for the 5.1 Election and stopped making its solvency payments, the union asked for and the company provided a copy of the annual actuarial report which gives information on the state of the pension fund. But this is no longer the case. At the end of September the Local was informed that the report had been filed with the

Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO), but Pittsburgh would not give permission to provide the union with a copy.

Such pettiness on the part of the mighty U.S. Steel does not bode well. From this and its overall conduct, Local 1005 has concluded that the Company cannot be trusted to look after the health of its Pension Plan. Rest assured that Local 1005 will indeed go to the FSCO to get a copy of the 2010 Actuarial Report and do whatever it takes to defend the Pension Fund.

**To contact USW Local 1005: Call 905-547-1417 or e-mail info@uswa1005.ca.
Visit the website: www.uswa1005.ca**