

At ABI workers' protest, USW officials accost and threaten WSWS supporters

By Laurent Lafrance
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United Steelworkers' officials have responded angrily and aggressively to the *World Socialist Web Site*'s exposure of their systematic isolation of the *Aluminerie de Bécancour* workers' struggle, and their readiness to work with Alcoa and Quebec's new rightwing-populist CAQ government to impose concessions and job cuts on the ABI workers.

Flanked by other supporters of the Steelworker (USW) bureaucracy, Dominic Lemieux, the assistant to the Quebec USW director, accosted and slandered WSWS supporters who were distributing a statement at last Wednesday's demonstration of ABI workers in Montreal.

Entitled "The way forward for ABI workers: No concessions, no cuts in pensions or jobs! The struggle must be broadened!", the statement warned that despite the ABI workers' courage and militancy, their struggle is in "grave danger," because of the rightwing corporatist policy of the Steelworkers union and the Quebec Federation of Labour (QFL).

With the aim of inciting workers against the WSWS supporters, Lemieux accused them of being in the pay of Alcoa and Rio Tinto and of seeking to weaken the ABI workers' struggle by dividing the workers from their union.

In response, this WSWS reporter pointed to a section of the WSWS statement that noted the Steelworkers' leadership has repeatedly declared its readiness to impose pension and job cuts. It reads: "According to USW Local 9700 President Clément Masse, the union had already agreed, even before the lockout began, to a new pension plan fully funded by workers. More recently, Dominic Lemieux, assistant to the Quebec director of the United Steelworkers, said the union is 'open to job cuts' at ABI 'if you introduce new technologies and things like that'."

At this point, a red-faced Lemieux identified himself, declaring, "I'm Dominic Lemieux."

Lemieux went on to confirm that, yes, the Steelworkers would accept job cuts. But he tried to blame the ABI workers for this, citing the fact that they ratified a previous Steelworker-negotiated contract that says the company can eliminate jobs through attrition if it "invests" in technology. (A worker subsequently told us that the company has used this clause to contract out work to companies paying significantly lower wages and benefits.)

The WSWS supporters kept their cool and, recognizing that a group of workers was listening to the heated exchange, sought to use it to make the case for a broadening of the struggle and to force Lemieux to explain why the USW refuses to fight to mobilize its members in Quebec and across North America in support of the ABI workers.

But Lemieux and his acolytes were not the least bit interested in debating the way forward for the ABI workers after more than ten months of lockout. They responded with further slanders and by acting in an increasingly menacing fashion.

Lemieux tore up one of the WSWS statements. Next, one of his associates grabbed bundles of statements from the hands of two of the WSWS supporters and threw them in the air. Workers, visibly shaken by the aggressive behavior of the Steelworker bureaucrats and fearing an altercation, counseled us to leave before the situation worsened. This we did.

The behavior of the Steelworkers' leadership attests to their nervousness and fear. Once again, their adamant hostility to any working-class mobilization against the ruling-class drive to gut workers' wages and social rights and use speed-up, contracting-out and technological change to slash jobs and their reactionary

appeals to shareholders and the political establishment have led workers into an impasse.

And when their anti-worker maneuvers are exposed, they react the same way they do to workers who dare to criticize them at union meetings or on the factory floor—with threats, intimidation and blacklisting.

Acting like despots, they arrogate the right to decide what workers are or are not allowed to hear and read.

Organically linked to the capitalist system by their many privileges, including multibillion investment funds like the QFL's Solidarity Fund, the union bureaucracy responds with antidemocratic methods worthy of the far right to the growth of working-class struggle. They fear losing control over their members and are horrified by the increasingly conscious efforts of workers to break free of their stranglehold.

Whether it be the “yellow vests” in France or teachers in the United States, workers' struggles are increasingly emerging outside the control of the pro-capitalist unions.

The WSWS and Socialist Equality Party will not be intimidated. We have sought to draw the attention of workers in Quebec, across Canada and internationally to the ABI workers' struggle, warning that the aluminum bosses are trying to impose sweeping concessions at ABI so as to set new regressive benchmarks for their operations worldwide. We have published close to two dozen articles in English and French on the ABI workers' struggle, as well as articles on the recent strike at Alcoa's operations in Australia.

We will intensify our efforts to bring a socialist perspective to ABI workers, to rally support for their struggle among workers across Canada and internationally, and to expose the treacherous maneuvers of the USW and QFL bureaucrats.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>