

Unions, Democrats wind up opposition to closure of Charleroi, Pennsylvania glass plant

Andrew Cahill, Shannon Jones
29 November 2024

The Anchor Hocking glass plant in Charleroi, Pennsylvania, which employs 300 workers and primarily produces Pyrex baking ware, announced earlier this month that it will officially be closing and transferring operations to a factory in Lancaster, Ohio. This follows the ruling of a federal judge, who rejected a motion filed by the state Office of Attorney General for a temporary injunction to block the removal of equipment from the plant on the grounds of anti-trust violations.

The State of Pennsylvania had earlier won a temporary restraining order against Anchor Hocking Holdings, the company that owns the plant, and Centre Lane Partners, the investment firm that controls the company, to stop the removal of equipment and other production material from the site.

The court ruling means that Anchor Hocking is free to proceed with its plans for a February 28, 2025 shutdown. Prior to the restraining order the company had already begun the process of dismantling its operations. United Steelworkers Local 53G at the plant reports that 40 workers have already either quit or been laid off. Anchor Holdings had earlier claimed that current employees would be given “a generous benefits package for the transition,” that is, for uprooting their lives to relocate to Ohio.

After public anger erupted with the initial announcement from Anchor Hocking CEO Mark Eichhorn on September 4 that the factory would be closing, Pennsylvania Democratic Senator Bob Casey, then locked in an ultimately failed re-election contest, had sought an anti-trust investigation to try to halt the closure of the plant. The Office of Attorney General followed up with its own action.

In seeking to halt the shutdown, Pennsylvania Attorney General Michele Henry noted, “The closure

of this longtime manufacturing hub will have permanent impact on the Charleroi community and surrounding neighborhoods, which depend on the plant for employment that is vital to the local economy and prosperity of families living there.”

However, this was mere election year posturing under conditions where Pennsylvania was pivotal to the chances of Casey and Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris.

Outside of a few perfunctory condemnations the United Steelworkers, the bargaining agent for workers at the plant, made no serious effort to mobilize workers against the plant closure.

In the wake of the ruling, the state and the United Steelworkers have essentially dropped any pretense of a fight to stop the shutdown of the glass plant.

The anti-trust case brought by the state revolved around a series of financial and legal maneuvers by the current owners of Pyrex bake ware. Originally owned by the Corning Consumer Products Company, Pyrex has been the property of Corelle Brands since 1998. Corelle merged with Instant Brands, the makers of the Instant Pot, in 2019, placing control of vast numbers of glass baking ware products and kitchen appliances into the hands of Corelle’s parent private investment firm.

After applying for bankruptcy in June 2023, Instant Brands was bought by the investment firm Centre Lane, which quickly transferred ownership of Pyrex and the plant that makes it to Anchor Hocking, one of the management companies that it owns. The speed of this corporate acquisition and the reshuffling and liquidation of its assets is an example of the ruthlessness and greed of the Wall Street financiers.

Rather than challenge the right of these corporate sharks to devastate the lives of workers, Pennsylvania officials merely alleged the merger process skirted anti-

trust regulations regarding oversight and reporting. The judge ruled that there was not sufficient evidence backing the state's case. As always, the judicial servants of corporate America hold that private property rights take precedence over workers' lives and livelihoods.

Glass production at the site of the present Charleroi plant dates back 130 years. Originally built by the Macbeth-Evans Glass Company, the works has been producing Pyrex glassware since it was bought by Corning in 1936. It has been one of the primary employers in Washington County, Pennsylvania. Current employees say that it has been one of the most stable and well-paying places to work in the area for decades. With the closing of the plant, the families of the 300 employees who work there are being disrupted.

Over the decades deindustrialization has led to a steady decline in the city's population, from a high of 11,400 in the 1920s to around 4,000 today.

North of Charleroi along the Monongahela River, US Steel operated mills in Clairton, McKeesport, Duquesne, Braddock and Homestead employing over 30,000 workers. All but two mills and a coke works remain, employing just 3,000 workers.

Throughout this period, the United Steelworkers bureaucracy sought to disarm the workers and defuse a fight against capitalism by whipping up nationalism and chauvinism, blaming the layoffs on imported steel, especially at the time Japan, South Korea and Brazil.

Over the past few years Charleroi has seen an influx of Haitian immigrants, leading to an uptick in population. During the 2024 election both Trump and JD Vance attacked the Haitian immigrants in Charleroi at the same time they were spreading racist lies about Haitians in Springfield, Ohio. The long campaign of nationalism and anti-foreigner chauvinism promoted by the Steelworkers bureaucracy provided fertile ground for Trump's racist attacks.

The Anchor Hocking closure is part of a broader assault on manufacturing jobs in the US and globally. It follows the recent announcement by Cabinetworks Group of the closure of its Thompsontown factory in central Pennsylvania this December, destroying 420 jobs. PepsiCo is closing its bottling plant in Harrisburg, affecting 127 workers.

Automaker Stellantis has cut over 4,000 jobs since September in the US and just announced the closure of

the Luton Vauxhall plant in England at the cost of 1,100 jobs. Another 12,000 jobs are on the block in Italy.

Ford, General Motors and Volkswagen have all announced major layoffs as part of the transition to electric vehicles, which is to be paid for by workers.

More cuts to come are on the horizon, with Boeing announcing earlier this month that it plans to lay off 2,500 workers in Washington state and South Carolina as part of a massive job cutting plan involving 17,000 workers.

In every case the bureaucratic trade unions have done nothing to fight back, outside of toothless protest stunts like the United Auto Workers bogus "Keep the Promise" campaign.

The struggle to defend jobs requires the global unity of workers in the fight against the corporate conglomerates that control Anchor Hocking and the capitalist profit system as a whole. This requires that workers take the initiative themselves by building rank-and-file committees independent of the pro-company unions as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact