

Steelworkers mount union campaign at Oregon Steel

United Steelworkers (USW) is nearing the end of a three-month campaign to unionize 566 employees at Evraz Oregon Steel Mills.

The operation, in Portland's Rivergate Industrial District, includes a spiral pipe plant, a structural tubing plant, and a rolling mill that turns slab steel into steel plate used in rail cars, barges, natural gas pipelines, wind towers and military armor.

The Portland complex has been nonunion since the company — then known as Gilmore Steel — permanently replaced striking union members in 1983.

But in 2004, Oregon Steel Mills agreed to be neutral towards unionizing efforts, as part of the settlement of a six-year labor dispute at Rocky Mountain Steel — its Pueblo, Colorado subsidiary. Oregon Steel Mills has since been bought by the Russian steel company Evraz.

The neutrality agreement, part of the union contract that covers the Pueblo workers, gives the USW a one-time 90-day window during which it can talk with workers in company break rooms, and contact workers from a company-provided list. If a ma-

majority of the Portland plant's production and maintenance workers sign union cards, Oregon Steel Mills is supposed to recognize the union.

The agreement commits both sides not to disparage the other. Because USW initiated the campaign in early August, the union has until Nov. 4 to gather the cards.

But the campaign has not been trouble-free. Oregon Steel Mills has hired the Burke Group, a Malibu, California consulting firm that specializes in "union avoidance." And both union and management accuse the other of violating certain terms of the neutrality agreement. An arbitrator will rule on those charges Oct. 15 (after this issue of the Labor Press went to press) and could give the union more time to sign up workers if its charges are found to have merit.

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