Holiday Greetings to All

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This past year was a challenging one for the Solvay Council, but our solidarity and persistence resulted in improved contracts for all of our locations engaged in negotiations. Your support was essential in getting Solvay corporate management to sit down and bargain face-to-face with our University Park and Chicago Heights, Ill., local unions.

Wearing the “Fair Contract Now” and “Solidarity” stickers on your hardhats and work shirts sent a clear message to management that we would fight for fair agreements no matter how long it took.

The “Fair Contract Now” signs and “Coming Soon” placards with a picket line graphic that you placed on your car or truck dashboards also ensured that, no matter where management went on the plant grounds, they could not avoid our message.

These mobilization activities work well, and they are a good tool to use in disputes with local management.

In this issue of “Standing Strong at Solvay” you can read about the mobilization we did to get good contracts at the University Park and Chicago Heights plants. Also in this edition are separate articles about what we gained at the two Illinois plants, plus Solvay’s commitment to correct the ventilation system at the University Park facility. I am glad local plant management was willing to take advice from OSHA on how to eliminate the fumes that were getting our people sick.

We have a USW Solvay Council Facebook page, so please check it out and tell your coworkers about it. You can find it at the link below:
https://www.facebook.com/USWSolvayCouncil456/

Next year is a good time to further develop our council and get our members involved in our union. Until then, I hope you all have a peaceful and restful holiday season with family and friends. It is a good time to start counting our blessings each day, and to tell and show others how much we love them before it is too late.

In Solidarity,
Carol Landry

Sign up Today for Chemical Text Messages!
Text the word chemical to 47486. When asked, type in your company name (Solvay).
It took worker mobilization and solidarity plus the International’s unyielding efforts to force Solvay corporate management to sit and remain at the table to get fair agreements for USW members at the company’s University Park and Chicago Heights, Ill., plants. Each site had a separate contract.

For months, corporate management’s style of negotiations with Locals 2011 at University Park and 7-765 at Chicago Heights resembled “drive-by” newspaper delivery. Management bargainers entered the room where union negotiators waited to start negotiations, dropped off their proposal, left to caucus, and usually returned at the next scheduled session.

District 7 Staff Representative Frank Shubert, who services both locations, said the company spent more time caucusing than meeting face-to-face with the union.

At one Chicago Heights negotiating session, the union bargaining committee came prepared: When company negotiators arrived to drop off their latest demands, they were surprised when union negotiators handed back to them a union proposal in response. At the Solvay Council meeting at the end of June, Shubert reported that Chicago Heights management admitted it had not looked at the union’s proposed package in 73 days.

**Mobilization**

The Solvay Council jumped into action in support of the two locals by engaging with them in two days of action. They wore “Fair Contract Now” stickers, signed a letter in support of bargaining for a fair agreement and delivered it to the plant manager at each location.

In the August action prior to bargaining, the Solvay locals displayed “Fair Contract Now” signs on their car and truck dashboards, including one sign with a graphic of picket signs and the words, “USW Coming Soon.”

There was international support as well. Jeff Hill, the USW representative on the Solvay Global Forum, brought the Solvay Council’s concerns about the lack of progress in bargaining at University Park and Chicago Heights to the other members. Hill also invited Alfred Kruft, a representative of the Solvay European Works Council and a member of the global forum, to the June Solvay Council meeting to hear members’ bargaining concerns. Kruft pledged to bring these concerns to the attention of top management.

**International Prods Solvay**

“If Frank (Shubert) and the local had not reached out to Carol (Landry), we wouldn’t have settled the negotiations,” said Local 2011 President Mike Spicknall from the University Park facility.

Landry contacted Jean-Christophe Sciberras, Solvay’s head of Industrial Group Relations, from the Brussels, Belgium corporate office and invited him and Gerald (Jerry) Prete, Solvay North American labor relations director, to listen to the workers’ concerns at the June Solvay Council meeting. Sciberras listened closely to Shubert, Spicknall and his members, and Local 7-765 Unit President David McGowan and his members from the Chicago Heights plant detail the issues and roadblocks they were experiencing in trying to get a fair agreement.

(OSHA Advises Solvay on Fume Problem)

Solvay’s University Park facility had such a ventilation problem that some employees developed asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, according to Local 2011.

The company sampled the air, and the local contacted OSHA, which toured the facility and advised how to resolve the fume issue.

Local 2011 President Mike Spicknall said the company will give respirators to the operators, and will devise an engineering solution in 2017, including the re-engineering of tasks so that employees will not have to dump as many bags full of product. Also, the reactor room, where batches of product are made, will be barricaded so that no one without wearing personal protective equipment can be in the area.

The University Park facility produces chemical bases—chemicals like sulfates and sodium chloride—for personal care products.
“Thank you for helping me understand your concerns,” Sciberras said to the council. “My commitment is to ensure the process we have of social dialogue is properly done. This process should be respectful, transparent.”

After the council meeting, Sciberras and Prete traveled to the University Park and Chicago Heights plants to talk with local management about their view of negotiations. Then they met with Vice President Carol Landry and another Solvay official to give their feedback.

Landry forcefully told Solvay’s top corporate leaders that if the company refused to take action to ensure U.S. managers followed the company’s policy of accepting and working with unions, the USW would pull out of the Global Framework Agreement (GFA) negotiated between the company and international labor federation, IndustriALL. Last summer, IndustriALL began negotiating a new GFA, and it would look bad on the company if our union was not a party to the labor pact.

**Management Comes to the Table**

Landry followed up with another letter and more phone calls to the company’s corporate management. After the mobilization activities and Landry’s persistence to get management to engage in face-to-face negotiations, Ron Lehman, industrial director for Solvay’s Novecare North American division, and other corporate officials came to the bargaining table on Oct. 11-12 to negotiate a contract for the University Park facility.

District 7 Director Mike Millsap participated in the bargaining on Oct. 11, and on Oct. 12, Prete joined the negotiations, Spicknall said.

“Director Millsap provided tremendous support to both locals during the entire process of getting a fair agreement at both locations,” Landry said.

Spicknall said both parties negotiated for 16 hours and that it was the first time the company moved on its positions.

“Getting the bargaining problems resolved helped us end up with an agreement the members could accept,” Spicknall said.

With the settlement of the University Park contract, Solvay corporate officials and union leaders proceeded to negotiate face-to-face and resolve the Chicago Heights agreement. They reached a tentative agreement on Nov. 10 and the membership ratified it on Nov. 16.

“International Vice President Landry and the local union negotiating committees at University Park and Chicago Heights did a great job at setting the stage for the final push for the agreements. They all were key to getting the company to sit down, negotiate face-to-face and get agreements with improvements in wages, retirement benefits and contract language,” Millsap said. “I am proud of the job they did.”

---

**Local 2011 Members Successfully Bargain Disciplinary Procedure in New Contract**

Local 2011 members at Solvay’s University Park, Ill., plant overwhelmingly ratified a new contract on Oct. 19 after negotiating for almost a year. The new agreement covers some 90 workers at the former Rhodia site.

“It’s times like this that prove why it is important to belong to a union,” said Local 2011 President Mike Spicknall. “Without a union, you don’t have a chance if the company decides to do something wrong against you.”

The contract went into effect Nov. 4, 2016 at 12 a.m. and expires Nov. 15, 2018 at 11:59 p.m.

Wages will increase 2.25 percent in 2017 and 2018. Plus, each worker will receive $1,000. Solvay calls it a “front-loaded” payment. The local maintained its health insurance benefits.

**Core Issue Addressed**

Getting contract language on progressive discipline was the key issue for the membership, Spicknall said. Such a program did not exist in the previous agreement, and as a result, he said the company treated employees differently.

“One guy was fired for cell phone use, while others were treated differently for similar infractions,” Spicknall said.

“If you don’t have progressive discipline, the rest of the workplace issues do not matter because you’re on the outside looking in if you are fired, and we need to (continued on page 4)
University Park Members Gain Improved Contract Language

(continued from page 3)

keep our jobs.

“We needed a fair disciplinary plan where everyone could understand the disciplinary steps,” he added.

Spicknall said the local, with District 7 Director Mike Millsap’s help, wrote proposed contract language for a disciplinary process, and the company agreed to it on Oct. 11.

An important aspect of the disciplinary process, he said, is that the grievance automatically proceeds to the next step if the company does not answer it in 10 calendar days. That ensures that problems do not linger and get ignored.

The local also was successful in shortening the time that disciplinary action would be in an employee’s file. Previously, a disciplinary action would remain in an employee’s file for 36 months, and additional discipline during that time would reset the three-year-period.

Now, the company can only keep disciplinary action in an employee’s file for 18 months, and if there is additional discipline during that time frame, the 18-month period is not reset.

Increased Match

In June 2015, Solvay harmonized its benefits, including the 401(k) program, but the local never received the paperwork describing the changes.

In this round of talks, Solvay agreed to match up to 9 percent of an employee’s total compensation—regular pay and overtime—for every 9 percent contribution into the plan from the employee.

“Under the previous contract, Solvay’s match was only based on straight-time pay. Having the company match on all earnings is a big increase,” Spicknall said.

Improved Language

Previously when there was a layoff, Solvay laid off employees and replaced them with contractors.

Another problem was that supervisors did bargaining unit work even when employees were available.

Under the new contract, the company must let union employees do a job if they are at the plant, instead of calling for contractors.

Spicknall said the company’s intention now is to have union employees do work instead of managers and contractors. Supervisors and contractors can only perform union work if it is no longer practical for a union employee to do so.

The local was hoping to add a substantial amount of time for union leave so members could attend more council meetings and conferences, take advantage of health and safety training and other union-related classes, and handle union business. Spicknall said a Nov. 3 arbitration case over the company’s decision last year to lay off two full-time maintenance employees, while retaining the contractors, took 60 hours of preparation.

Solvay agreed to add 60 hours to the 200-hour limit for arbitration preparation, union meetings, council meetings, conferences and education. The local still has to pick up the lost-time cost for officers and members engaged in union business.

Rough Start

Solvay laid off seven bargaining unit employees before Local 2011 entered bargaining on Nov. 2, 2015. Members rejected the company’s “last, best and final” proposal on Dec. 17, 2015. Then they worked under the previous agreement until a new one was negotiated.

This is the local’s third contract. The group organized in July 2010 and obtained a first contract in 2011, becoming Local 2011.

“Members want to prepare for the next contract talks,” Spicknall said. “I complement our members for sticking together on their demand for a disciplinary procedure. Management said that wages only mattered to the people, and they were wrong.”
Local 7-765 members overwhelmingly ratified on Nov. 16 a new three-year agreement that covered 27 workers at Solvay's Chicago Heights plant.

The new contract included wage increases, access to benefit programs that all Solvay employees have, and improved contract language that clarifies union employees' labor rights and work.

Workers received a 3 percent wage increase upon ratification, a 3 percent raise the second contract year and a 2.5 percent lift in pay the third year.

They also will be able to participate in the same health and welfare plans as all U.S. salaried plant employees. This includes the 401(k) and retirement benefits that were part of Solvay's “harmonization of benefits” in 2015.

District 7 Staff Representative Frank Shubert worked with Local 7-765's bargaining committee for 11 months to craft an agreement that would address issues between local management and the local union.

As reported in the previous Solvay Council newsletter, plant managers thought the local was using information requests as a “revenge tool.” They also wanted to restrict the number of those serving on the grievance committee to two members, and to require permission from the plant manager or his or her representative for union activities to occur on company property.

Both parties reached a compromise over management doing maintenance bargaining unit work. Now, management has to exhaust all available means, including call-outs, before allowing a manager the right to “troubleshoot” equipment.

Shubert said that Solvay “reluctantly agreed” to leave the probationary period at 90 calendar days. The company removed the words, “new plant,” from the contract language, and this removal protects employees who transfer from other USW-organized Solvay plants from having to repeat the probationary period.

“The local’s negotiating committee worked hard, and was willing to withdraw its outstanding economic and non-economic proposals, including the main issue of ‘double-back,’ pay in order to reach an agreement,” Shubert said. “Now, the members can focus on the next three years and mobilize for the next contract.”

Union Activities

In the new contract, it clearly spells out that “employees have the right to engage in union or other concerted activities protected by the National Labor Relations Act. It is understood that such activities may not be conducted during the employee's working time or in a manner which interferes with other employees in the performance of their work during their working time....”

Union activities can be done, without management’s permission, at the plant during “the employee's meal or break times, or times before or after their working time.”