

October 13, 2016

**No to the Austerity Agenda! Defend Rights of  
Public Sector Workers and Services They Provide**

## **Nova Scotia Public Sector Workers Reject McNeil Government's Anti-Social Austerity Agenda**



Protest against Bill 148 outside Nova Scotia legislature, December 2015.

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### No to the Austerity Agenda! Defend Rights of Public Sector Workers and Services They Provide

## Nova Scotia Public Sector Workers Reject McNeil Government's Anti-Social Austerity Agenda

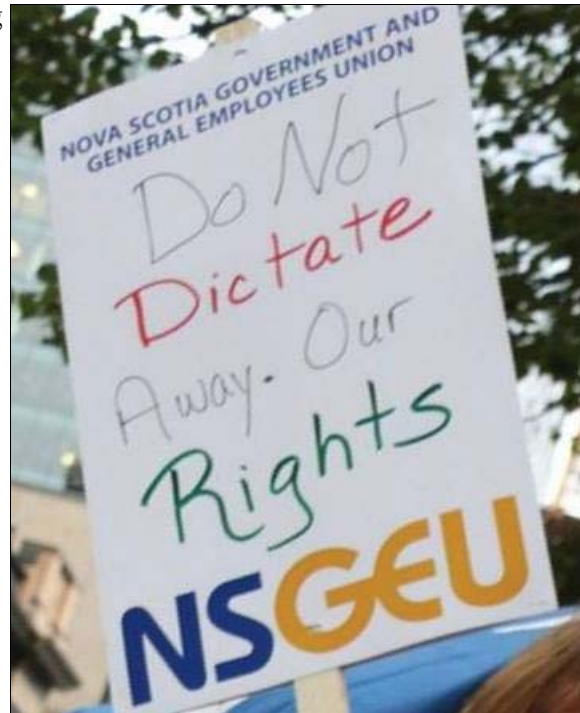
Public sector workers in Nova Scotia are gearing up for battle against the anti-social austerity agenda of the Liberal majority government of Stephen McNeil. Abusing its power, the government is denying workers their right to negotiate their working conditions, which are the conditions in which public services are delivered.

The workers are particularly incensed at the passing on December 18, 2015 of Bill 148, the *Public Services Sustainability Act*. This bill, under the hoax of guaranteeing the sustainability of public services, attacks those who provide the services. It imposes a ceiling on wage increases for all provincial public sector workers of 0 per cent, 0 per cent, 1 per cent and 1.5 per cent per year and 0.5 per cent on the last day of the contract. If negotiations end up in arbitration, the bill binds the arbitrator to these parameters in terms of wage increases.

The bill also retroactively ended as of April 1, 2015 the accruals of monetary benefit from retirement allowances and sick leave. The McNeil government has not yet proclaimed the bill saying that it will do so if negotiations or arbitration suggest that discussions are going beyond the parameters set by the bill. In other words, the workers and their unions are supposed to negotiate with a gun to their head and agree with the attacks of the government, which is also their employer, or face the full weight of a proclaimed Bill 148.

In this context the Nova Scotia teachers recently voted down a tentative agreement that had been reached in September. Teachers oppose the phony negotiations and blackmail that either they accept an unacceptable wage offer and deterioration of their working conditions or face the hammer of the law.

The civil service workers organized with the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees' Union (NSGEU) are also considering voting down a tentative agreement that was reached with the province last November prior to the passing of Bill 148. In January, the bargaining committee for the province's 7,600 unionized civil servants voted 96 per cent to recommend rejection of the



tentative agreement after the union conducted meetings with the workers across the province. The passing of the anti-worker Bill 148 was a major factor in the recommendation to reject. A press release from the bargaining committee said "the government's heavy-handed legislative interference" was the cause of this change of mind. Health care workers who are members of NSGEU are now entering negotiations for the renewal of their collective agreement. They have also declared that they want to reach a negotiated settlement that is to their satisfaction without the sword of Bill 148 hanging over their heads.



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## Discussion with Jason MacLean, President of Nova Scotia Government and General Employees' Union

*Workers' Forum* recently talked with Jason MacLean, the President of NSGEU, about the situation facing its members and the people of Nova Scotia. Jason denounced the travesty of negotiations that is being imposed on public sector workers. He explained that besides the issue of the imposition of a wage ceiling, the attack on the retirement allowance was crucial in their minds because it forms part of their current collective agreement.

"The bill strips our Long Service Award according to which a member, upon retirement, is eligible to collect one week's pay per year of service up to 26 weeks. That is in our collective agreement and the employer is trying to take it away from us. Also in Bill 148, they are taking the accrual away from the workers who have accumulated it. Their stop day would be April 1, 2015.

"Essentially, the government is passing [these changes] and the government is the employer as well. What they are doing is taking articles out of the collective agreement by legislation. If we were to agree and vote on it and say yes, we are good with that deal, we would be accepting it and we would therefore have no challenge. But if we were to vote it down, then we could pursue a legal challenge in the Court, a *Charter* challenge.



"This bill is a tool that the government is using to try to strong arm us into a deal, to make us accept these austerity measures by taking the deal and lose these articles in our collective agreement forever. So we believe that this is the better way to go, to defeat this deal and try to go back to the table. If we cannot go back to the table, then we would enter conciliation with the employer and hopefully move on in arbitration.

"In the meantime the government could go ahead and proclaim Bill 148. Meanwhile, we are looking into a legal challenge to somebody digging into the collective agreement and taking out articles by legislation. Those articles have been freely and collectively bargained over years and years. No one can just come in and say we do not want them anymore and get what they want."

MacLean explained that the union is about to go across the province and present the recommendation to reject the tentative agreement that was reached under the threat the government would impose a contract otherwise. The votes are expected to take place from mid to late



November.

He said in conclusion: "What I say about this process is that the government has pushed the people to the wall and the people are standing up for themselves and saying that we are not accepting your austerity measures. Labour in Nova Scotia is united on this and we are going to be consulting and working together all the way."



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## Growing Resistance to Quebec Government's Bill 10



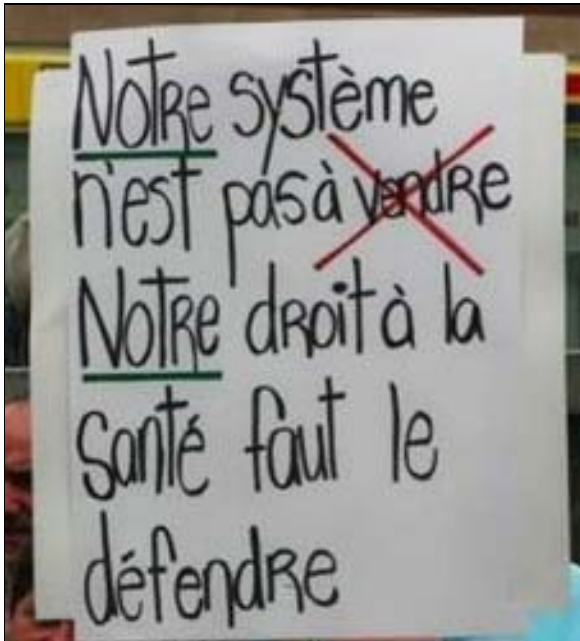
**Health care workers demonstrate in Montreal, October 1, 2015 against Couillard government's anti-austerity agenda.**

### ***Bill 10 attacks the working conditions and delivery of services in the health care sector***

Workers across Quebec are holding actions against the deterioration of working conditions in the health care sector caused by the anti-social restructuring of the sector by the Quebec Liberal government. Bill 10, *An Act to modify the organization and governance of the health and social services network, in particular by abolishing the regional agencies* is a major component.

The bill was passed under closure by the Couillard majority government February 7, 2015. The law concentrates decision-making powers in the health care system in the hands of the Minister of Health. It has reduced the number of network facilities from 182 to 33, whose governing boards are appointed by the Minister and may be removed by him at will.

Quebec workers say Bill 10 and the entire anti-social offensive in health care has caused further chaos in the sector to the point that working conditions have become untenable seriously putting the well-being and safety of workers and patients at risk. Actions are underway in all regions to expose what is really happening in the health care system under the anti-social restructuring, and demand changes.



On October 6, workers protested the decision of the centrally appointed board of the Integrated Health and Social Services Centre in Lanaudière region to centralize medical labs in big urban centres resulting in losses of jobs and services across the region.

Actions took place during the summer in many regions. On the Quebec North Shore, workers protested the elimination of positions in the emergency services in Sept-Îles, which has created chaos in the emergency rooms. In the eastern region of Lower-Saint-Lawrence, health care workers denounced proposed cuts in the range of \$20 million for the area in addition to the \$17 million reduction already imposed. They said the situation is becoming untenable putting both patients and workers at risk. Rampant burnout and exhaustion amongst workers are

common. Reductions in funding are extensive in departments such as Intensive Care with the closing of beds and in mental health units. In one municipality, the only remaining nursing position in mental health services was eliminated.

Bill 10 centralizes decision-making in the health care system away from those who do the work and into the hands of managers appointed by the Minister. Their positions are dependent on the continuing benevolence of the Minister who demands they behave like CEOs in the private sector with the bottom line as the sole concern. To reduce salaries without consideration of the effect on the provision of services and public expertise, these CEOs are charged with centralizing administration through the elimination of thousands of positions in finance, payroll services, procurement and other sectors.

The government is also planning attacks on health care professionals and technicians. One example is the Optilab Project which is about centralizing the medical labs across Quebec to eliminate hundreds of jobs. Minister of Health Gaétan Barette has referred several times to a so-called over-consumption of lab tests, saying that doctors, especially family physicians, are prescribing too many scans, x-rays, blood tests etc, which according to the Minister are useless. Minister Barette said in this regard that family physicians generally speaking spend too much time doing medical checkups and preventive medicine rather than focusing on people who are having "real medical problems." The Optilab project relies on the most expensive technology offered by the specialized private enterprises in lab technology funneling health care money into their private interests. With this centralization favouring private companies, the lab services currently available in hospitals are being reduced to the minimum and positions of lab workers slashed.

Bill 10 has also centralized youth centres under the direct management of the new Integrated Health and Social Services Centres. Workers in many youth centres recently denounced the reduction of services for youth, which they say has had a serious impact on their working conditions and the well-being of the youth. Staffing is totally inadequate resulting in out of control workloads and a rise of acts of violence against staff.

Workers also report that with Bill 10, their previous limited ability to deal with issues with local authorities has gone. They now have to deal with people with no power called coordinators. Workers call them "mailboxes" because all they do is receive reports and complaints, and workers

receive no response. They are told their issues are being studied but no space or avenues exist to discuss issues and make sure things are done.

One of the main features of Bill 10 is to channel all resources into the medical services that are the most profitable for the global monopolies. Accompanied with reduced investments in health care, this trend takes the system further away from providing comprehensive health care for all. The bill also restricts the say and control of health care workers over the work they do and the problems that arise. The result is both chaos and paralysis in the system.



The government considers having organized workers and unions in the system and any worker say or control to be an "administrative burden." Bill 10 imposes restructuring of trade union affiliation across the health care sector interfering in workers' right to organize themselves according to their own thinking, views and needs. The centralizing of health care institutions into basically one mega institution per region requires that only one trade union can be certified per institution to represent workers in each of the four prescribed categories: (1) nurses, (2) ancillary services and trades, (3) office workers and administrative technicians and professionals, and (4) health care professionals and technicians.

The government demands health care workers vote for new trade union affiliation according to the categories outlined in Bill 10, which is deliberately causing utmost disruption within workers' organizations and in their relations with each other. Workers are denouncing this government interference in their union affairs and want it stopped.



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## Effect on New Brunswick of Federal Cuts to Health Transfers

*- Interview, Daniel Légère, President, Canadian Union of Public Employees New Brunswick -*

**Workers' Forum:** In a recent joint communiqué of the New Brunswick Council of Hospital Unions (NBCHU) and CUPE New Brunswick, you write that you are worried the federal government is underfunding health care to accelerate privatization in the provinces. Can you elaborate?

**Daniel Légère:** Health care costs, certainly in New Brunswick, which has the fastest aging population are increasing. Pressures on the health care system are increasing. With that comes the cost of the delivery of the service to the people of New Brunswick. Not increasing the scale from 3 per cent to 6 per cent will significantly impact that. [Federal transfers will drop in 2017 from a guaranteed six per cent annual increase to funding tied to economic performance with a three per cent minimum -- *Ed. Note* ]

We are very concerned that we will start seeing the encroachment of private health care in our province, which leads to a two-tier system. Those with the ability to pay will get fast-tracked into

the private system and be able to jump the queue.

The other concern around that is when you have privatization you have a drain of human resources. Every jurisdiction I think has a problem, certainly in Eastern Canada, in recruiting new doctors and keeping new doctors in our communities, especially in the rural communities. Right now in New Brunswick, there are many thousands of people who don't have a family doctor. If privatization were to compete for those human resources, it would just aggravate that problem.



In New Brunswick, we are living in a situation where we have long waiting lists for elective surgeries. One factor for that, although not the only one, we are starting to see in New Brunswick a demographic shift from the northern part of the province to the southern part of the province, especially the Francophone communities. We are calling that the second deportation. Young people are leaving the Acadian Peninsula and moving to Moncton and Dieppe where there are more opportunities for employment, which puts an extra strain on the health care system. There are population booms in our urban centres.

Then there is the problem of human resources, which I have already mentioned, to have the people to deliver the health care system. The third part of this is funding. We have these three problems -- funding, long waiting lists and shortage of doctors. The decision on transfers will compound these problems. It will certainly compound the problem with the human resources as well as the financial resources.

We are also very concerned with the direction that our provincial government is going in welcoming with open arms a pay-for-blood plasma clinic that is going to go into Moncton. We are concerned on a number of levels that it will erode our public blood service system and is a move to privatization. Certainly blood products are part of our health care system, we are concerned with that, we are trying to put the spotlight on it for the public; why this is the wrong thing to do in our opinion. Right now our blood collection system is a voluntary system. The government is proposing that a private company will pay donors for blood plasma in New Brunswick. It will erode our public blood system. This company has been known to set up in areas where it can prey on society's most vulnerable.

Also we spent millions of dollars on the Krever inquiry. [The Commission of Inquiry into the Blood System in Canada that was established by the federal government in 1993 -- *Ed. Note* ] We all remember the tainted blood scandals back in the 1980s. There were five principles that came out of the report. One of them was not to pay for blood. It should be a strictly voluntary system.



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### **Fight for Secure Work and Higher Wages**

## **Mass Rally Demands Changes to Ontario Labour Law**

Five thousand workers gathered at Queen's Park in Toronto on October 1 to demand Ontario labour law favour working people, particularly marginalized workers in sectors referred to as



precarious. Many workers travelled by bus from across the province -- from Ottawa, Alexandria, Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Barrie, Windsor, St. Catharines, Cambridge, Hamilton and many other communities. Contingents marched to Queen's Park from the Steelworkers' Hall and Allan Gardens.

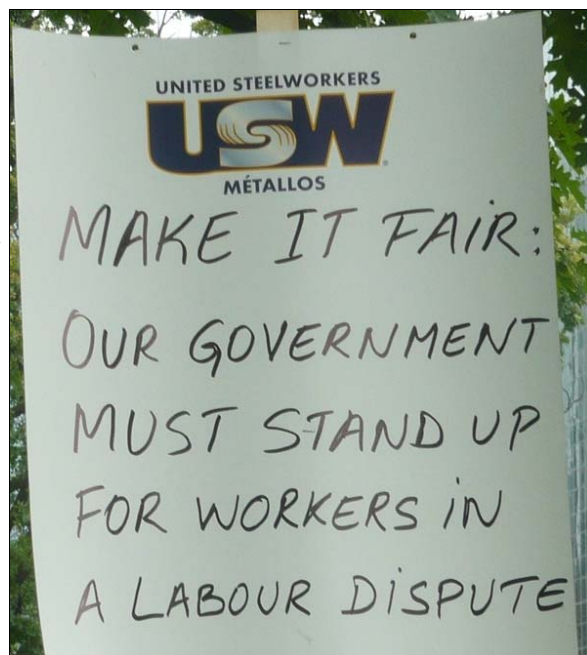


Participants included workers from hotels, grocery stores, libraries, airports and educational institutions who are facing contracted-out and part-time work with few legal protections or means to enforce standards where they do exist. The workers are confronting labour laws that defend private monopoly interests and the financial oligarchy. In many cases, existing labour law does not offer workers even minimum protections. Many of the workers present were youth and recent immigrants employed in those sectors of the economy where they are most vulnerable.

Speakers demanded that the Ontario government's ongoing Changing Workplaces Review result in laws that protect the most vulnerable workers and help bring an end to abuses and attacks.

One speaker related his experience organizing in the food processing industry where workers struck for 22 months before reaching an agreement with their employer. Others spoke of the experiences of hotel workers working in union versus non-union hotels, of seniors increasingly forced into precarious work because they cannot afford to retire, and the legal obstacles faced in organizing among part-time college workers.

Participants' placards and banners expressed Ontarians' demands for governments to affirm workers' rights instead of facilitating their violation. In addition to calls for a \$15 minimum wage were demands for paid sick days, legislation to ban the use of replacement workers, and to allow card-check certification to reduce employer interference in unionization drives. Demands included standards for mandatory rest time between shifts, province-wide standards for benefits and job security for part-time, contract and full-time workers alike, and an end to contract flipping.[1] One serious issue raised was the need for governments not only to have laws on the





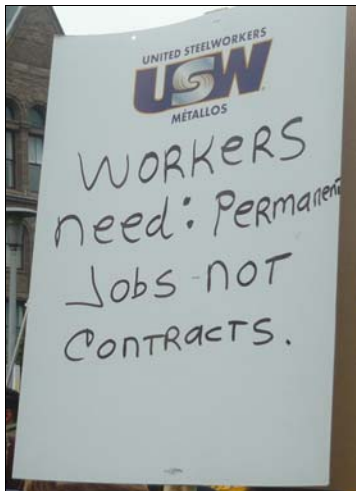
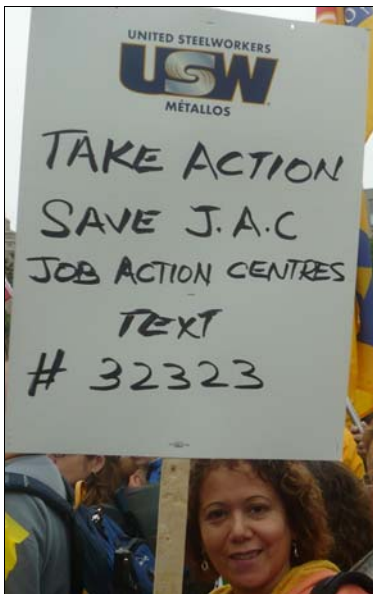
books protecting workers, but to enforce these laws proactively.







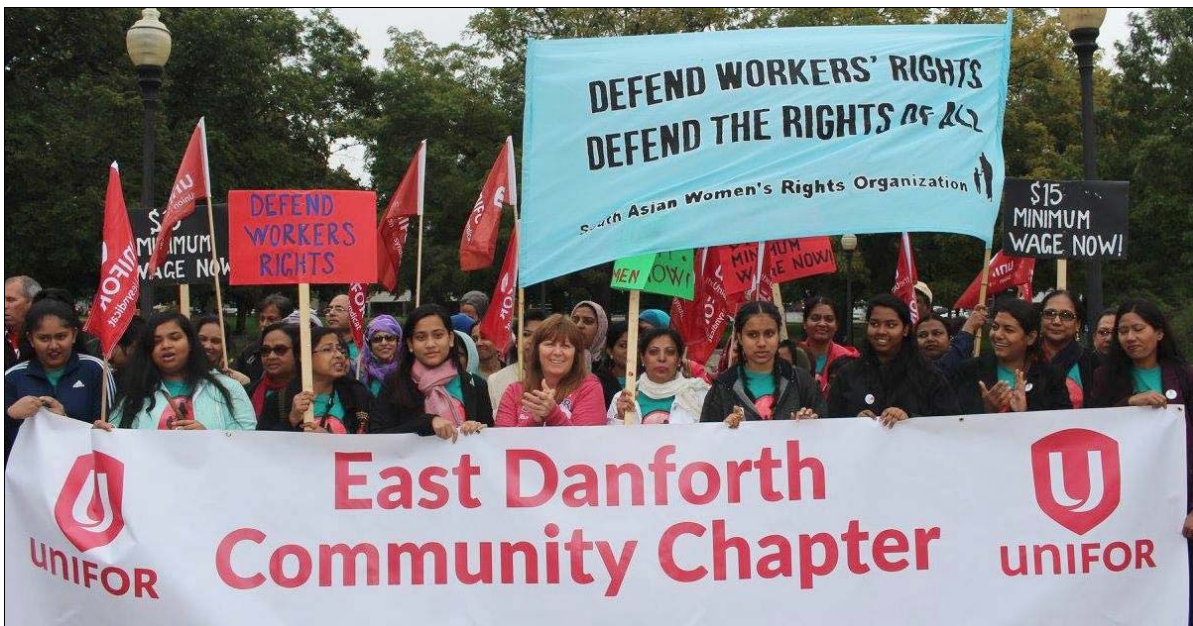








## Women from Bangladeshi Community Speak Out for Secure Work and Higher Wages



*A contingent of fifty people, mostly Bangladeshi immigrant women working at low-paid, precarious jobs were mobilized to participate in the rally at Queen's Park by the East Danforth Community Chapter of Unifor (Unifor-EDCC) and the South Asian Women's Rights Organization (SAWRO).*

*Below are excerpts of the speech delivered to the Unifor rally at Allen Gardens by Shapla Yesmine, the President of Unifor-EDCC and her co-speaker Husna Sweet, Secretary/Treasurer of the Chapter.*

"We represent a community of immigrant women who have been pushed into low-wage,

precarious jobs on the margins of the labour market. Our community women want to end our marginalization. We want changes to the Employment Standards Act to force employers to respect our human dignity and rights as workers. We want real jobs and living wages -- starting with increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour...."

"Immigrants do not leave their homes and families to come to Canada to live in poverty like outcasts. When I came here from Bangladesh I expected to find a job at standard Canadian wages and to work hard at that job so my family could enjoy a Canadian standard of living. But that is not the reality for many newcomers.

"I have worked for 12 years at minimum wage jobs in retail and light manufacturing. Year after year I have had to work 60 hours a week at three different jobs just to survive -- always struggling to pay the rent and pay the bills and no time for family life. Working and living like this is an inhuman stress on me and my family. It is not a human life. It is not what I expected when I came to Canada.

"Many women in our community are in the same situation as me or worse. Our community people are vulnerable to super-exploitation by employers because we are new entrants into an oversupplied labour market. As well, we are suffering from the increased use of part-time work, temp agencies and two-tier wage and benefit systems by employers. All of this gives employers the power to trample our workplace rights and human dignity. Even the minimum legal employment standards are violated with impunity. Government action is needed to restrict employers from using their increased market power to abuse workers.

"Government action required to improve the lives of our community people includes measures:

- to raise the minimum wage to a living wage with an immediate increase to \$15 per hour
- to restrict employers' use of part-time work and how part-time work is scheduled
- to restrict employers' use of temp agencies and how temp agencies operate
- to require employers to give the same pay and benefits to workers doing the same job
- to rigorously enforce the Employment Standards Act...."



"This action today shows that the union movement and our community people both recognize that we have to fight together against employers pushing to turn Canada into a low-wage economy. Union workers are fighting to defend Canadian standard wages and working conditions and we precarious workers are fighting to achieve Canadian standards.

"We Are All in this Together! The People United Will Never Be Defeated!"

## Note

1. "Contract flipping" is where a company changes contracted-out service providers every few years often resulting in job losses, lower wages and worse working conditions. Collective agreements are usually scrapped whenever contracts flip, meaning that workers must organize again and renegotiate their contracts. This was among the concerns of the contingent of workers from Pearson International Airport who participated in the rally.





## Precarious Existence for Steelworkers and Retirees Resistance to U.S. Steel's Attacks



Protest at USS Gary Works, August 26, 2016.

The workplace death of Jonathan Arrizola at U.S. Steel's Gary Works occurred just weeks after steelworkers staged protests against worsening working conditions. Firings and demotions of maintenance workers and outsourcing of their work had provoked militant demonstrations at the end of August and into September.

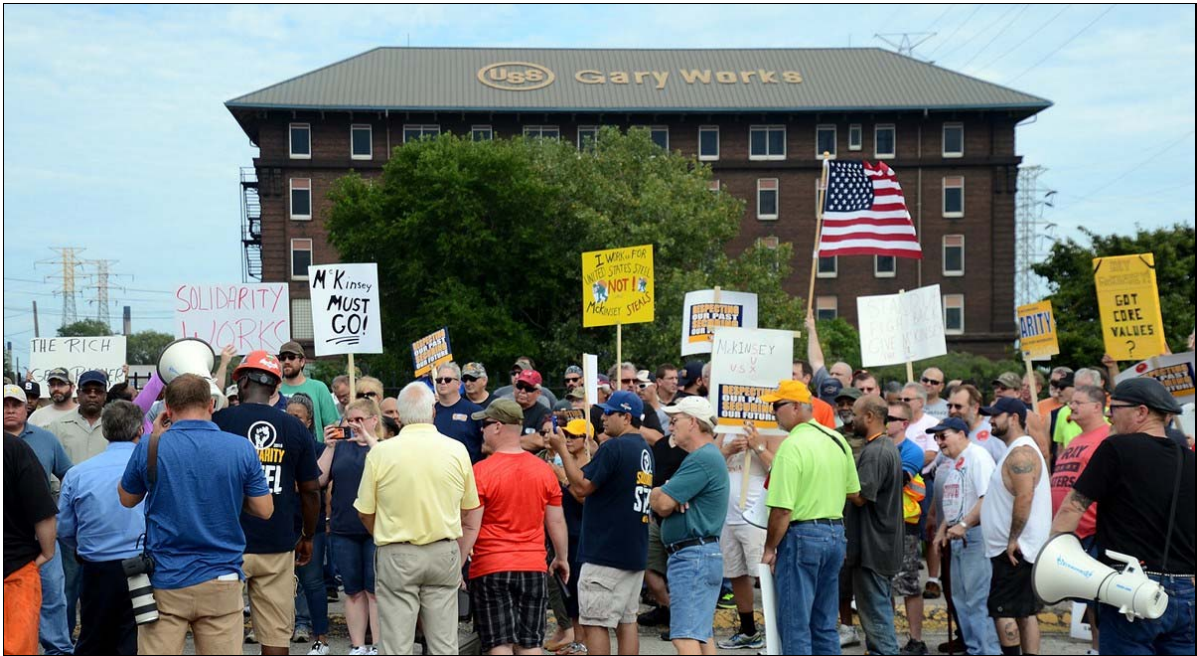
At Gary Works, U.S. Steel had fired 75 maintenance workers and demoted an additional 200 to work gangs with pay cuts between \$7 and \$9 per hour. Steelworkers say the ultimate goal of the company's anti-worker campaign is to replace current maintenance workers with outsourced workers who do not belong to the local unions at the plant, receive lower wages and benefits, and are not members of the pension plan. Steelworkers report that hundreds of maintenance work orders are going unfilled and little preventative maintenance is being done. This led to serious safety concerns that something tragic would happen.



Gary Works' steelworkers and their allies responded to the attacks on their rights and security with militant demonstrations and other actions. Hundreds of steelworkers gathered on several occasions in downtown Gary and marched in determined fashion to the gates of Gary Works to express their opposition.



Steelworkers express the sentiment that without staunch resistance to layoffs, outsourcing and other attacks on their rights, U.S. Steel will intensify its anti-worker actions throughout its empire. They are determined to stop it. The workplace death of fellow steelworker Jonathan Arrizola saddens all workers and gives more urgency to their resistance to attacks on their rights and well-being.



Demonstration outside Gary Work of USS, August 26, 2016.

(For additional information on the tragic death of Jonathan read *Workers' Forum* October 6. Photos: B. Taylor.)



## Time for a New Direction and Aim for the Economy

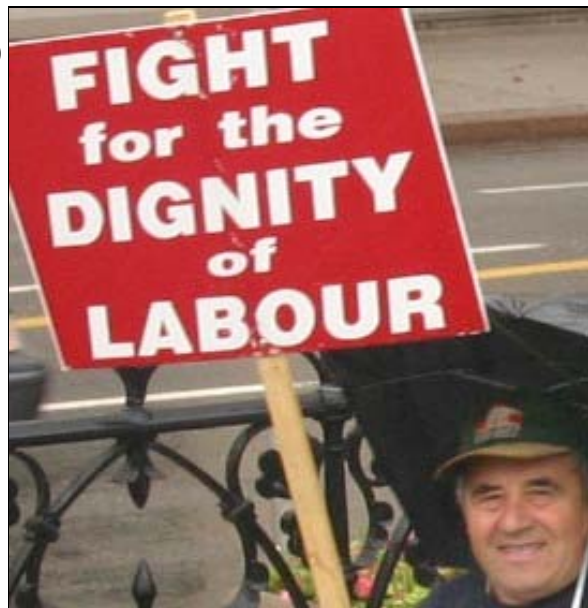


*Who is responsible? What is to be done?*

A battle of ideas has erupted between the steel barons and steelworkers over who is responsible for the crisis in the steel sector and what is to be done. The steel sector has to be revitalized with steelworkers allowed to work and produce the social wealth necessary for the working people's collective existence and to meet the general interests of society. Laid-off workers and retirees must not be left to fend for themselves. The modern economy of socialized industrial mass production is so productive the rich even accuse it of over-production yet many working people are left wanting and even destitute. The problem lies with the outmoded direction and aim of an economy that serves the rich at the expense of the working people who produce the wealth.

Steelworkers and retirees are under assault throughout the U.S., Canada and Mexico. The steel barons and their governments refuse to accept responsibility for the crisis. In Canada, both U.S. Steel Canada and Essar Steel Algoma are under the fraud of bankruptcy protection where their jobs, pensions, benefits and production facilities are considered fair game for rich predators. In the U.S., layoffs are extensive as the sector reels from one crisis to another.

U.S. Steel laid off 1,600 steelworkers at its Granite City Works last December and January, joining 400 others who lost their jobs as far back as April last year. Granite City is a community of Greater Saint Louis. USW Locals 50 and 1899 report that most unemployment benefits for their members have run out and many have also lost their health benefits. U.S. Steel has not given any hope that the plant will soon reopen if at all. With industrial jobs scarce in Saint Louis and government social programs virtually non-existent many steelworkers have been forced to seek charity to keep their families alive. This desperate situation is unforgivable in a developed country with extensive socialized industrial mass production. Stories of hardship abound but simply exchanging such stories does not change the grave situation and real pain that is felt or give rise to a new pro-social direction. For that to occur, the working people need to organize and fight to make it happen.



The North American steel barons and their governments are in charge yet they deny all responsibility for the crisis. Like snivelling cowards that refuse to face up to what they have done, they point fingers at some Chinese officials tens of thousands of kilometres away as the culprits. The steel barons and their representatives refuse to accept responsibility even though they have been in control all along. What cowards they are who refuse to be held to account for the damage they have caused to the working people and the social and natural environment, and to accept that pro-social change is necessary and overdue. They are only interested in defending their class privilege and control of their social wealth and empires. They want to wipe their hands of the problems they have caused for retirees, workers and their communities and environment. The only solutions they propose, which are not solutions, are to demand concessions from working people and to attack the Chinese, which is all very convenient if not farcical, cruel and a recipe for further disasters. The steel barons are the ones in charge in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, not the Chinese steel barons. If a solution is to be found, it has to be found at home, here in the countries of North America and not in some far off land where we have neither power to change the situation nor any business interfering in their lives and politics.

Solutions begin at home in our own countries and economies. The problems lie with the narrow

direction of the economy that serves the rich and their insatiable greed at the expense of the working people. This must change! The time is now for the working people to put their stamp on their economy with a fight for a new direction that stops enriching the few at the expense of the many and begins to serve and guarantee the needs and well-being of the working people throughout their lives.

***Stop Paying the Rich! Increase Investments in Social Programs!  
Time to Change the Direction of the Economy from Enriching the Few to  
Serving the Working People, the Ones who Produce the Social Wealth!***



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