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Truckers Defend Their Rights

The Fight for Legal Recognition

- Normand Chouinard -



Truckers converge at Quebec National Assembly, November 19, 2016. (s. Thibault)

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Truckers Defend Their Rights

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Not a week goes by without actions to defend the rights of truckers and to bring into being the legal recognition of the trucking profession. Of particular note was the very successful rally last November 19, when 600 trucks converged on the National Assembly in Quebec City. This was a key moment in the fight of truckers to organize and mobilize themselves to affirm their rights. Truckers are an important contingent of the working class in Quebec and Canada fighting for their rights. Through their organizing and action with analysis they are determined to take their rightful place in

the economy and give it a new pro-social direction that upholds the rights of all.

One activity is the circulation of a petition demanding that truckers be recognized as road professionals whose work should have standards, acceptable to truckers, that are applicable across Canada. They tabled their petition in the Canadian Parliament on Friday April 7. The petition is an action of the truckers themselves who have widely circulated it to their peers across Canada. It represents an important step on their part to reverse the damaging deregulation of the sector governments have undertaken since the 1980s. Truckers seek to improve their working conditions, which includes their safety and that of the public. An aspect of this struggle is to reduce competition amongst truckers so that the industry operates in a spirit of cooperation.



Truckers point out that their petition is addressed to the Minister of Transport and they travelled to Ottawa to present it to Parliament. The petition includes basic demands regarding the work in the sector, which should be of great concern to any government. Despite this, neither the Minister nor any representative of the Trudeau government had the decency to take part in the press conference held in Ottawa when the petition was tabled. This was an unacceptable attack on the dignity of truck drivers.

Organizing to Defend the Rights of Truckers



Rally, March 21, 2014, at Port of Vancouver, where 1,500 truck drivers organized work stoppages in fight for right to negotiate terms and conditions of work acceptable to themselves.

Last December, the Canadian Transport Federation, a not-for-profit organization, was established to ensure the presence of truckers' representatives in various federal bodies dealing with transportation issues. According to its website, the organization is planning to work closely with the Association des routiers professionnels du Québec, whose primary mission is to have a place on the Government-Industry Consultation Table in Quebec dealing with road safety for heavy vehicles.

Another group of truckers concerned with issues in the transportation sector is linked to a web radio channel called, "Heure juste du camionneur" (HJDC). This group recently established the National Association of Canadian Truckers. According to the HJDC, this new association differs from the Canadian Transport Federation in the sense that its immediate aim is to raise enough funds to legally defend truckers accused of criminal negligence. Truckers generally are powerless on their own when

accused. Without money and organization, they have difficulties in defending themselves. The purpose of this association is to stop the criminalization of truckers when an incident occurs in the course of their work. The Association is planning to provide a service including lawyers and lobbyists to defend any trucker who is charged.

The work of setting up national organizations has become a necessity for thousands of independent brokers or contract truckers who generally find themselves without real representation. With this organizing work and actions, truckers are developing their battle to defend their rights and dignity in their respective workplaces and throughout all regions.

Truckers are determined to change a situation where the conditions in their industry have greatly deteriorated due to successive deregulation over the past 30 years and the growth of companies with immense power. A profound imbalance has developed in the working conditions of truckers, which they are organizing to change. Every day, truckers confront the power of the major manufacturing and transport monopolies and a state machine that bows to every demand of those who control the sector. Through organizing and actions with analysis, truckers are fighting to defend themselves and their dignity and establish a new equilibrium in relations of production that favours them and defends their rights.



Organization and unity of truckers across Quebec and Canada are key to the development of the fight to ensure that the movement of truckers for the affirmation of their right to decide the direction of their industry continues and is successful. By building their unity in action, the various groups will be able to measure the strength they have achieved in defending their rights and in transforming the situation in their favour. Each step forward brings greater understanding of how to wage the battle in defence of rights and greater unity amongst workers in the industry and with their allies. The mobilization of all in this work is necessary to create a strong momentum that develops without letup.



Petition Tabled in Parliament



Truckers converge on Quebec City, November 19, 2016.

A petition demanding recognition of the trucking profession was tabled in the House of Commons in Ottawa on April 7. The petition is the initiative of truckers from Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Alberta. The petition has to date received more than 6,000 signatures from Quebec, all

provinces, the Northwest Territories and Yukon. In addition, 24 people from outside Canada signed the petition.

The petition from truckers tabled in Parliament reads:

Petition to the Minister of Transport

Whereas:

- there are many problems associated with training, credentials recognition, safety and licences for newcomers;
- working conditions are unsuitable: base salary, overtime only after 60 hours, statutory holiday calculations, unhealthy lifestyle, lack of job security and health issues;
- the provincial ministers have refused quasi-systematically to recognize military licences versus civilian licences;
- selection programs and training programs vary from one province to another, preventing wider access (scholarships, grants);
- there is an increasing shortage of drivers since professionals have left to seek better living conditions, even if it means a pay cut;
- the trucking industry is largely under federal jurisdiction, and enforcing provincial road safety legislation and legally recognizing that this occupation is a profession would help reverse this shortage;
- we provide a service that is essential to the Canadian economy;
- there is a chance the American administration will overstep its bounds and tax cross-border truckers;

We, the undersigned citizens of Canada, call upon the House of Commons to recognize all truckers, regardless of company or province, as road professionals.

We also call for standards to apply from sea to sea, taking into account economic disparities, as regards salary, protection from American taxation, benefits, health and safety, and the quality of life for drivers and owner-operators.

The petition was sponsored and tabled in Parliament by the NDP MP Ruth Ellen Brosseau representing the Berthier-Maskinonge riding. In a press conference, MP Brosseau said, "[the trucking industry] is crucial to our regions, our economy and especially to the people who have a job that's closely or indirectly related to this industry. Truckers are facing significant provincial disparities in benefits, wages, and health and safety conditions. This sector is vital to the Canadian economy."



Suzan Sidwell, a former truck driver and the petition's first initiator said, "The truckers' grumbling

against working conditions and the disparity of standards has been felt for several years. With this petition a clear message is sent to the federal government, that they must take the leadership role to ensure that the trucking profession is properly recognized."

Daniel Beaulieu, a driver with more than 30 years of experience and a facilitator of the Facebook page "L'Heure juste du camionneur" (LHJDC) was the last to speak at the press conference saying, "For nearly 40 years following deregulation, gaps have been sneakily introduced into the conditions of truckers. I have noted that in 2017, a feeling of loneliness and of not being heard settled in with each trucker.... Last November 19 [*the large gathering of truckers at the National Assembly in Quebec -- WF note*], it was not the industry that stood up but those who keep it going in spite of all odds. On November 19, we proved to the rest of Canada that it was time for us to unite, to build a common front and move forward.... Today's petition for the recognition of the profession is a continuation of this action."

No representative from the federal Ministry of Transport or the Liberal government attended the event despite the importance of the problems that were raised by the truckers.



New Bid for Ownership and Control of Algoma Steel

Failures Underscore Necessity for New Direction for the Economy

- K.C. Adams -



A group calling itself "certain secured creditors of Essar Steel Algoma Inc." has launched a website to promote its bid to gain ownership and control of Algoma Steel in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. The group does not identify who the "certain secured creditors" may be. The two main creditors of Essar Steel Algoma claiming to be secure are the U.S.-based Social Wealth Controlling Funds (SWCFs) Golden Tree and Bain Capital. Those two SWCFs plus Deutsche Bank headquartered in Germany, the main Debtor-In-Possession of Algoma's *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA) bankruptcy process, appear to have gained control of this particular bankruptcy. However, they are being challenged by another U.S. based SWCF/oligopoly calling itself in Canada, Maga Steel Corporation.[1]

The website of "certain secured creditors" of Essar Steel Algoma argues "the need for change at Algoma" and presents a "restructuring plan." Workers can immediately identify a problem with the

plan outlined in the website: it isolates Algoma Steel from the Canadian steel sector and broader economy and directs its fire internally at the Algoma Steel active and retired workforce, demanding concessions.

The plan presents Algoma Steel in isolation from other parts of the steel sector and its place and role within Sault Ste. Marie's interrelated economy and more broadly in the Canadian economy. By presenting problems at Algoma Steel in isolation from the overall socialized economy and demanding concessions from the workforce, the plan ignores the underlying problems in the sector and economy that need to change if any plan for a particular part of the economy is to be successful.



This is the fourth time Algoma Steel has been under CCAA and the second time the Stelco steel producer in Southern Ontario has been in bankruptcy protection. These failures underscore the necessity for a new direction for the economy where Canadians can exercise control over their own economic affairs and solve the problems as they pose themselves, instead of pretending one part is not connected with the whole and that concessions from the workforce are a solution.

The various parts of the steel sector, if they are going to solve their particular problems, require as a priority changes to the overall economy and scientific planning of Canadian steel production in all regions to meet the apparent steel demand of an independent Canadian economy without interference from outside the economy. These changes must include measures to ensure the market price of steel reflects its price of production here in the Canadian economy and not a price the oligarchs dictate in the U.S. or

elsewhere in their imperialist system of states.

The website of "certain secured creditors" alludes to the problems of the steel sector but, instead of proposing a new direction, reduces the issue to one of stealing the claims of the working class on the value it produces and taking that social wealth out of the local and Canadian economy for the benefit and use of "certain secured creditors" from the United States. The website highlights the volatility of the price of steel but instead of offering solutions diverts from the issue to an attack on the claims of steelworkers and retirees and on rival producers within the imperialist system of states.

The group says, "As we have seen over the past 18 months, the price of steel is highly volatile (HRC has ranged from U.S.\$354 to U.S.\$653 per ton). However, it cannot be assumed that the current high price of steel will continue over the long-term."

Instead of proposing ways to control the volatility of the prices of steel and raw material inputs within a Canadian economy under sovereign control, the website turns its ire on current and retired workers saying: "Algoma's current defined benefit pension plan situation is unsustainable. Algoma's ongoing labour costs are significantly higher than those of its competitors."

Lowering the claims of workers, retirees and society on the steel value workers produce and shifting that value to "certain secured creditors" is not a solution. It does nothing to solve the root problems in the steel sector and economy. Rather than tackling the problem of finding a new stable and secure

direction for the Canadian steel sector and economy without recurring crises, the website uses the problems in the steel sector as an excuse to attack those who produce the steel value and to demand they lower their standard of living while working and in retirement.

To increase their claim on the value Canadian workers produce, the "certain secured creditors" from the U.S. also want relief from environmental and other regulations and a lowering of the claims of the state on steel value. Shifting around the claims of the value Algoma Steel workers produce away from themselves and the Canadian state to the SWCF owners does not sort out the problems in the steel sector. The refusal to chart a new direction is the main reason why Algoma Steel and Stelco are permanently in crisis mode.

The website writes, "We need to create an Algoma that is sustainable and profitable for the long-term and able to withstand the cyclical nature of the global steel market." They do not realize how irrational and idiotic they are when they use the words "sustainable" and "cyclical" in the same sentence. They refuse to acknowledge that the "global steel market" is a big part of the problem.

The website continues, "The community of Sault Ste. Marie, Algoma's employees and the steel industry are well aware of Algoma's three prior restructurings, including one under employee ownership. None of these restructurings have resulted in a sustainable business. 'Kicking the can' has been ineffective in the past and is not a viable solution now."



A partial description of a situation without analyzing the root is woefully incomplete and self-serving. This refusal to analyze degenerates into an anti-worker "kicking the can down the road" attack on the Algoma steelworkers who have steadfastly defended their right to defined-benefit pensions and Canadian standard wages and affirm that concessions are not solutions.

The website does not analyze or discuss the root problem in the economy, which stems from the lack of control by Canadians over the steel sector and the overall contradiction between a completely socialized production process within an interrelated economy clashing with the private control of competing parts of that socialized economy. Control over the steel sector and economy is exercised by privately-controlled SWCF/oligopolies mostly located in the United States. They compete to defend and expand their private social wealth and empires without consideration for the development of the whole and the necessary connections amongst its parts, leading to recurring and increasingly severe crises.

The "certain secured creditors" are not interested in a viable sustainable steel business in Canada. They are interested in building their private empires and retaining control over the parts of the socialized economy they own, in contradiction with the working class and in competition with the parts of the economy they do not control. They are not interested in having the socialized forces of production brought under the control of the actual producers in a spirit of cooperation amongst all the parts of the economy within a defined territory called Canada. They refuse the challenge of the times to bring the various socialized parts of the Canadian economy into harmony with one another to ensure stability and security by being outside the domination of the crisis-ridden and warmongering U.S.-led imperialist system of states. The current crisis-ridden direction of the economy and control of the oligarchs over the Canadian and U.S. states are the conditions the oligopolies demand for empire building. Canada needs a new direction!

The oligarchs need steelworkers to produce the value they covet, raw material, socialized forces of

production and a market for production. This puts the "certain secured creditors" and other oligarchs in a social relation with the working class they require to expand their social wealth and within a complex modern interrelated economy. The oligarchs exercise control over particular parts of the economy, which in this case includes Algoma Steel. They use this power and the power of the state they control to exercise a dictatorship within the social relation with steelworkers and salaried employees.

At this time, the oligarchs are not interested in having equilibrium with the working class within the social relation imposing instead an unrelenting anti-social offensive for decades. The disequilibrium within the social relation contributes to the recurring crises of the socialized economy under their private control. Within this chaotic atmosphere and pressure of crises and war, the oligarchs increasingly use the police powers of the state, such as the CCAA, to have their way. Using their great social wealth and police powers of the state they strive to dictate their will within the social relation with the working class and deny workers their rights. This retrogressive activity of the oligarchs makes the situation worse for the economy and working people.

Concessions Are Not Solutions! No Means No!

The actual producers of steel value, steelworkers and salaried employees, need to claim some of the value they produce for their own reproduction and survival until they pass away. Other claims on steel value are needed to meet the general interests of society. How large should those claims be? Who decides the size of the claims? The "certain secured creditors" want to dictate what the working class claims according to their own narrow private use for empire building, not just at Algoma Steel in Sault Ste. Marie but throughout their sprawling global empire. To this end, their website contends that owners and investors in steel production are suffering downward pressure on their rate of profit and rate of return on their investment and need relief through a greater claim on the value workers produce. Otherwise, they will not invest and may even dismember the facility and sell it off piecemeal.



They write, "Algoma must become a more efficient manufacturer with a more flexible cost structure. Massive expansion of steelmaking capacity in countries like China and Brazil (with low labour costs and lax environmental standards) have made Algoma uncompetitive. In North America, there has been a significant increase in production by mini-mills that have lower costs due to more flexible cost structures, more modern steelmaking facilities and locations closer to their customers.

"Algoma's cost structure is significantly higher than its North American competitors because: Algoma remains one of the last single-plant companies in North America and is competing with larger, multi-plant companies. Algoma's current defined benefit pension plan situation is unsustainable. Algoma's ongoing labour costs are significantly higher than those of its competitors."

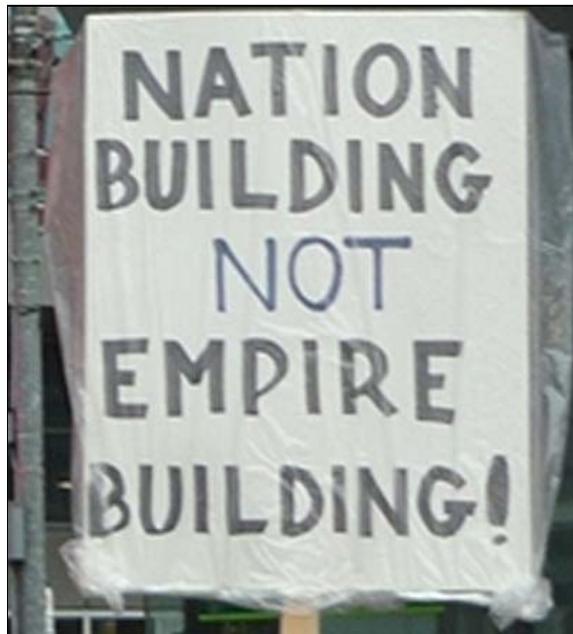
One wonders why they would even bother making a bid given their extremely negative view of Algoma Steel and the steel sector generally. The clue is in their plan to go after workers' wages, benefits and pensions. The website declares wages and pensions a "labour cost," presumably a cost to the investors. Yet, the working class produces the value it claims as wages and pensions. To present the claims of the working class as a cost to the investors is self-serving in the extreme. Such a retrogressive view against the actual producers of value does not lead to finding solutions to

economic problems in a modern economy.

The working class produces all the value within a socialized economy. The division of that value amongst the claimants requires a calm atmosphere and arrangements agreeable to workers within the social relation, not dictate on the part of investors and ridiculous accusations that workers and their claims are a cost of production. Within the current social relation, the produced value has to be divided up amongst the claimants in a spirit of equilibrium not dictate.

The "certain secured creditors" are proposing to make Canada even more captive within the imperialist system of states and incapable of running its own affairs. They are proposing a lower standard of living for Canadian workers and austerity for the society generally so that the oligarchs can stuff their pockets and build their private empires, compete with their global rivals and wage predatory wars. To fulfill their aim of empire building, they seek to destroy any notion of an independent Canadian economy and nation-building, and smash any conception of a Canadian standard of living and a society that cares for its members.

They threaten Canadians saying any investments in the mill will only come "if Algoma has a competitive cost structure." This cost structure is dictated by them on their terms according to their aim for private profit and their outlook of empire building in contradiction with the Canadian working class and in competition with other oligarchs within the imperialist system of states. Their imperialist aim and outlook are incompatible with the aim and outlook of Canadians for their own independent economy and a nation that they control and direct to serve the well-being of the actual producers and the general interests of Canadian society. An independent economy and state that serves the interests of its own people can and must organize norms, expectations, rules and laws on how to decide the size of the claims of all claimants on the value workers produce. Such a Canada cannot allow dictate on the part of foreign or other investors to decide the size and distribution of claims. That is a recipe for disaster, disequilibrium and recurring crises.



The website of "certain secured creditors" at Algoma does not speak of equilibrium within the social relation with those Canadians who produce steel value. Far from it and that is a big problem. The website demands disequilibrium and no right of the actual producers to decide their claims and no right of Canadians to decide and control the direction of their economy and how much value society needs for its general interests.

The "certain secured creditors" want to use Canadian workers to produce value for them and use Canada's resources and territory for their empire building. They make it clear that they do not want any interference of Canadians in their empire building even though this is Canada and not theirs. They do not want Canadians affirming their rights and exercising control over their own lives, economy and society, which begins with control over their economy in a defined territory under a government of laws. The opposition of the oligarchs to the right of Canadians to their own economy and society under their control is a big problem Canadians must solve.

Who controls the economy and for what aim? The empire-builders want complete control without

any equilibrium with Canadians. They refuse to allow Canadians any control over their economy and lives. Canadian steelworkers and their allies are confronting this problem in the steel sector and are determined to find a solution that favours themselves, the Canadian economy and society and opens a path in a new pro-social direction. A step in this direction is the determination of active and retired steelworkers at Algoma Steel and Stelco to defend what is theirs by right from the assault of the oligarchs. On their banners are written:

***Hands Off Our Pensions, Wages and Benefits! No Means No!
Keep Stelco and Algoma Steel Producing!***

Note

1. A *Social Wealth Controlling Fund* (SWCF) acts in the fashion of an oligopoly. The social wealth it controls spreads like tentacles throughout the socialized economies of the imperialist system of states. The SWCF/oligopolies control large swathes of sectors from top to bottom, and control the ways their associated companies interact with one another in the sector and beyond into other sectors throughout the imperialist system of states. They also exercise direct control over the state and its institutions such as the police powers of the CCAA in Canada and Chapter 11 in the U.S.

The enormous size of their holdings of social wealth and state-organized control allows the SWCF/oligopolies to manipulate economies to their particular advantage to generate big scores, even deliberately creating crises when it serves their narrow interests. Their actions include robbing workers' pensions and savings and expanding their empires through seizure of raw material, regions and companies through bankruptcies, schemes for big scores, predatory wars, regime change and crises that are either well planned and executed with military precision or occur suddenly without warning.

The U.S.-based Bedrock SWCF/oligopoly is attempting to take control of Stelco and rob its pensioners of their benefits and savings and deny responsibility for environmental remediation. There appears to be collusion if not outright cooperation amongst those in control of Bedrock, U.S. Steel, its Canadian subsidiary again known as Stelco, the Ontario Superior court and the police powers of the CCAA, and the federal and Ontario governments.

Another U.S.-based SWCF/oligopoly headed by Thomas M. Clarke from West Virginia has announced a rival bid to take ownership and control of Essar Steel Algoma while under CCAA in opposition to the bid of Golden Tree, Bain Capital and Deutsche Bank. Clarke's SWCF/oligopoly goes under numerous names including Maga Steel Corporation, Kissito Healthcare International, Southern Coal Corp., and ERP Compliant Fuels. The Clarke SWCF/oligopoly has recently acquired Oak Grove Mine in Alabama and Pinnacle Mine in West Virginia from the infamous Cliffs Natural Resources, and seized the Maple Mine in West Virginia and an associated coke plant in Alabama while they were under Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Its numerous holdings include three mines in BC producing metallurgical coal used in steel production, and ownership of a 13,500 acre forest in Belize and control over an area along the Mississippi River flood plain both used for "carbon offsets" to allow its coal companies to produce without legal or other concerns for environmental problems or penalties. The Clarke SWCF/oligopoly also leads the Virginia Conservation Legacy Fund with control over more than 30,000 acres of land in that state, while at the same time being a large coal producer in the region that will benefit from President Trump's loosened environmental regulations on the coal sector.

(The website of "certain secured creditors" can be found at www.algomasecuredcreditors.ca)

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