

February 1, 2018

Need for Decision-Making Power

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Need for Decision-Making Power

Workers' Fight to Determine Working Conditions Themselves

Workers in every sphere of the economy are striving to be the key factor in determining their working conditions, which is their right. Social workers, teachers, nurses, construction workers, food service workers and workers in every place of work know the conditions in which they work; they know what is necessary to carry out their work properly, be it safety measures, staffing levels, tools, training, instruments, knowledge and so on. They know what their claim should be on the value they create to have a Canadian standard of living and security in retirement. They know how their work is part of the overall interconnected economy as a whole. If the socialized economy is to function without crises and unleash its full potential, their particular sector must work together in conformity with all other sectors and parts, respecting and treasuring the work of one and all.



One of the biggest frauds today is found in how the modern economy is organized, in particular the relations between those who do the work and those who do not. Workers do the work modern society demands and produce all the value contained in goods and services, while others, be they management, owners, or government politicians and bureaucrats make the decisions, determine the conditions and direction of the work, what happens to the social product that workers create, how the value is distributed, generally imposing a narrow will and aim which favours those who have taken possession of all the wealth created by society. This arrangement blocks those who do the work and require conscious collective participation in making decisions which affect their lives. This must be put at the very centre of modern life, which is the workplace. No modern country can declare itself democratic while this upside-down state of affairs continues.



Third Week of Lockout at ABI Smelter in Bécancour, Quebec

Workers Firmly Declare, "The ABI Conflict Is Not a Private Matter"

The 1,030 workers at the Aluminerie de Bécancour Inc. (ABI) smelter have now been locked out since January 11 by the Alcoa and Rio Tinto monopolies who are the joint owners. As soon as the workers were locked out, the union representing them, United Steelworkers Local 9700, denounced this odious gesture that serves a hidden agenda. The union contacted the Minister of Labour and asked that the government intervene to bring the owners back to the bargaining table and negotiate in good faith a collective agreement acceptable to the workers. The minister replied that this is a "private dispute" in which the government cannot intervene.



Workers strongly reject this statement and ask for government intervention. During their visit to the picket lines of ABI workers on January 25, workers of the Alma Aluminum Workers' Union, USW Local 9490, who were also locked out for six months by Rio Tinto in 2012, strongly stated that the conflict is not a "private conflict" between a company and a local union, as the Minister claims.

"We brought with us our mobilization trailer that we used in 2012 and we decorated it with the colors of ABI workers for them to use it too," said President of Local 9490 Alexandre Fréchette. "We brought it to draw attention to the conflict. Why? Because the impact of the conflict is more than just 1,000 workers taken hostage, it is their families, their community and it's a whole region, the subcontractors, the suppliers, a lot of people who depend on the ABI aluminum smelter who are taken hostage. There is a political dimension too. We are demanding to know from the government what is happening? They must answer to the people whether or not Alcoa and Rio Tinto are negotiating with the government on energy issues, if they are asking for lower rates. They must answer because it concerns all Quebeckers. It is not true that it is a private conflict between a private company and the union. The energy rebates given to aluminum smelters are an issue for the people of Quebec who foot the bill because we are the ones subsidizing it. We have our say in this; we must be aware of it and support the workers so that the conflict ends in the shortest possible time."

To the applause of everyone, Fréchette announced that Alma's union will provide \$15,000 a week in financial assistance until the end of the conflict.

The next day, the Quebec director of the United Steelworkers, Alain Croteau, who also came to support ABI workers on their picket line, reiterated the remarks of the Alma workers saying, "We find ourselves in front of two multinationals that receive significant benefits in the form of very low electricity rates and who are taking the people as hostages. The lockout ultimately has little to do with labour-management bargaining. Workers are paying the price for shenanigans to raise aluminum prices and lower electricity rates. The Quebec government cannot stand idly by. The resources belong to us as Quebeckers and the government must remember that it represents us. We are the ones who vote the government into office, not Alcoa. Premier Couillard needs to talk to the company executives and have them sit down at the bargaining table so that we can have a negotiated contract, not one that is being imposed as they are trying to do right now."

Croteau was joined by United Steelworkers' Canadian director Ken Neumann, who pledged to

mobilize all locals to support the ABI workers. He was also accompanied by two Los Mineros union representatives from Mexico who brought greetings from Mexico's miners.



Nova Scotia

Social Workers Step Up Fight to Determine Working Conditions and Increase Investments in Social Programs

Social Workers in Nova Scotia recently sent a letter to the Minister of Community Services and built a website to express their views and continue their fight to have a say over their working conditions. The website is called changeDCS.org.

This group of workers work under Policy 75, meaning they are Private Practitioners. They have close working relationships with public Nova Scotia social workers and firsthand experience with the conditions of work under the Department of Community Services (DCS). They have chosen to speak out on behalf of vulnerable clients and public social workers who may fear potential retaliatory actions if they raise their concerns regarding the conditions of children in public care.

Workers' Forum stands with Nova Scotia social workers and supports their just stand to raise their concerns with the conditions of work and the implications these conditions have on the most vulnerable people in Nova Scotia. Their concerns should be a basis for broad discussion amongst the people.

The letter to the Minister of Community Services is posted below.

Dear Minister Regan,

The undersigned social workers, most of us involved in the provision of counselling services for clients of the Department of Community Services, Child Protection section, are writing to express our serious concern regarding the current service delivery and significant stressors in DCS Child Protection.

The following three areas appear to us to reflect problems we have observed in our involvement with DCS-Child Protection colleagues and clients over the past year:

1. Difficulties with regard to human resource management;
2. Systemic impact resulting from new legislation on DCS-CP and Dept. of Justice (including silos between provincial agencies and the federal government); and
3. Children and family care planning.

These are particular examples of the issues noted above:

- high caseloads which are challenging the quality of case management and increasing risk to vulnerable children and families

- dramatic increases due to a variety of possible reasons, in absences or turnover of staff
- significant difficulty reaching workers to discuss service delivery
- lack of departmental direction and policy to improve culturally competent DCS service delivery to clients, and/or children, of African Nova Scotian descent
- despite some changes, there continues to be evidence of chaos in the arrangement of visitation for families, resulting in already traumatized persons losing low wage work time, and sometimes losing jobs
- reduction in salary of case aides
- impact of the passage of new legislation which effectively shortens time lines for child protection matters before the court, resulting in increased pressures on families, legal aid lawyers and child protection colleagues
- passage of new legislation without the corresponding increase in the resources necessary to meet it requirements
- insufficient administrative support for front line social workers, requiring them to spend unreasonable amounts of time in paperwork, administrative tasks, and requiring them to function as resource organizers rather than social workers focused on case management and direct service delivery
- lack of essential coordination between DCS and Revenue Canada to address the enormous gap in timeline for the return of the Child Tax Credit for very poor families -- at their time of greatest need after meeting the requirement for return of children to their care.
- social workers not wanting to speak out for fear of potential disciplinary action, and clients fearing to speak out from concern that their matters with child protection will be negatively impacted

While we are not ourselves front line child welfare social workers, and recognize the limitations of not being inside the DCS, we are sufficiently involved, with considerable experience, to be able to comment on our observations with credibility. We ask that our concerns be heard, and that serious consideration be given to the implications for vulnerable families.

Please respond at your earliest convenience with an opportunity for us to meet with senior staff.

Sincerely,

Lanna MacLean (Dartmouth), Jackie Barkley (Halifax), Beth Toomey (Sydney), Debbie Reimer (Kentville), Ian "Tay" Landry (Dartmouth), Marlene Furey (Halifax), Pam Roberts (Halifax), Roger Godin (Halifax), Elizabeth Shein (Halifax), Diane Nickerson (Pubnico), Marie Meagher (Antigonish), Robert Wright (Halifax), Annemieke Vink (Dartmouth), Cheryl Thompson (Hansport), Marion Sheridan (Antigonish), Marjorie MacDonald (Sydney), Donna Fitzpatrick (Amherst), Andrea Boyce (Sackville), Ken Osbourne (Halifax)



Public Sector Workers' Defence of Their Rights and the Rights of All



Demonstration outside opening of Nova Scotia legislature, September 21, 2017, against the August 22 passage of Bill 148.

The anti-democratic attack on workers' rights was on full display in Nova Scotia when the McNeil Liberal government imposed its dictate on teachers, nurses and all other public sector workers with the passing of Bill 148, the *Public Services Sustainability Act* on August 22, 2017. McNeil, despite interventions by thousands of Nova Scotians including teachers, students, counsellors and countless others, refused to increase investments in education or make any of the changes and improvements brought forward and demanded by the people, and instead rammed his anti-social austerity dictate down the throats of all.

The deteriorating conditions in the schools presented with full evidence, statistics and recommendations by professionals, fell on deaf ears. Teachers and education workers have refused to accept the McNeil government's dictate using Bill 75 to impose wages and working conditions on them and attacking students learning conditions. Teachers have since launched a court challenge to the legislation and continue to challenge the government's schemes to go further in attacking education using a new "review." More and more working people in Nova Scotia are recognizing that they must say *No!* to the current direction and find a way to stop the anti-social trend.

Social Workers Join Other Public Sector Workers Demanding a New Direction

Social workers, particularly in Child Protection, have come forward to demand changes in their working conditions. Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU) President Jason MacLean in a press release last October 11 said, "Child Protection Social Workers are responsible for assessing and protecting the safety and well-being of kids in need. They need a manageable workload so they have the time and resources to make the right decision for vulnerable children and families."

Earlier, in May of 2017, the NSGEU sent a letter to the McNeil Liberal government outlining difficulties social workers face because of specific conditions of work relating to:

- caseload management,
- staff levels,
- safety of social workers,

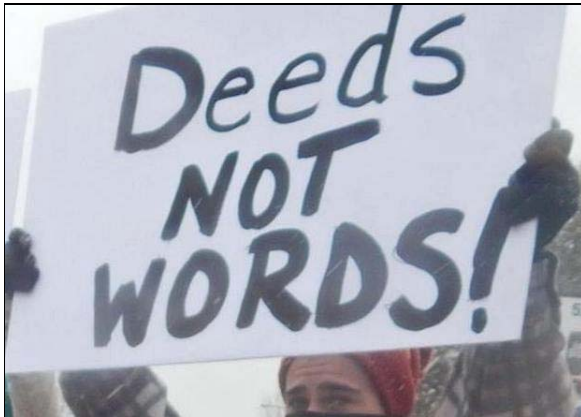
- safety of children in their care,
- and their ability to meet the Standard of Care required as outlined in the new *Children's and Family Services Act (2017)*.

The NSGEU stated in their letter, "We have collected a number of constructive suggestions for improving our members' working conditions and consequently the service they provide."

Instead of congratulating social workers for their dedication to the well-being of the youth and giving them the resources and green light to make the desired improvements, the province responded with the empty words of detached bureaucrats, "The Department is open to meeting and discussing the impact of the important transformation work that is underway within [the Department of Community Services (DCS)] which is focused on ensuring that children and their families receive the best service possible.... The Department of Community Services shares the commitment to ensuring that the social workers who provide front line support to children and youth in the care of the Minister have the appropriate tools and conditions within which to carry out their important duties."

The words are from the McNeil Liberal playbook of spouting sweet nothings and policy objectives to deprive workers, be they teachers, social workers or others, of their right to decide and take action to solve problems. A proverb to avoid solving problems because it does not fit the anti-austerity agenda of the ruling elite springs to mind -- the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Deeds Not Words!



The working people of Nova Scotia are not questioning the good intentions of McNeil or the bureaucrats of the DCS. Such questioning of words and intentions is futile indeed and working people have long come to understand this truth. They are questioning their deeds! They are questioning why those who do not do the work make the decisions for those who do the work. This backward way has become entrenched all across Canada and is a major reason why problems are never solved and the modern economy cannot be mobilized to its full potential

to guarantee the rights of all and the general interests of society.

Governments of the ruling elite at all levels across Canada are well versed in saying certain things to be elected or stay elected. They ensure their political parties and words dominate the mass media using money, social connections and the archaic electoral rules that promote and fund cartel political parties and not the electoral process, which should guarantee the right of all to elect and be elected with an informed vote. The avalanche of words, good intentions and policy objectives are meant to cover their anti-social deeds and the reality that they have done nothing concrete to resolve any problems facing the people.

How long will Nova Scotia be a have-not province, without a vigorous all-sided self-reliant economy that unleashes the tremendous potential of the people and resources? How many more years will child poverty be a problem for which the austerity warriors cry crocodile tears and spout sympathetic yet empty words? How many more years will the education system be in chaos? How many more years will social workers face increasing workloads and problems for their safety and the safety of children in their care? How many more years will workers be blocked from exercising

their right to decide and to build the new?

The Way Forward

A most pressing issue for the working class of Nova Scotia as well as elsewhere in Canada and Quebec is to step up its efforts to affirm workers' right to make the decisions concerning their conditions of work. Time and again, those who do the work come up against a government or some other institution, enterprise or governing body with an anti-social agenda serving narrow private interests that negates workers' right to decide and blocks them from solving problems. By discussing and acting as a collective to end the state of affairs that keeps them sidelined and marginalized from making the decisions that concern their working conditions and other affairs that affect their lives and the general interests of society, working people are affirming not only their own rights but the rights of all.

Join the Discussion and Collective Force to Build the New!



Toronto

Campbell Soup to Shut Down Canadian Manufacturing Plant

- Janice Murray -

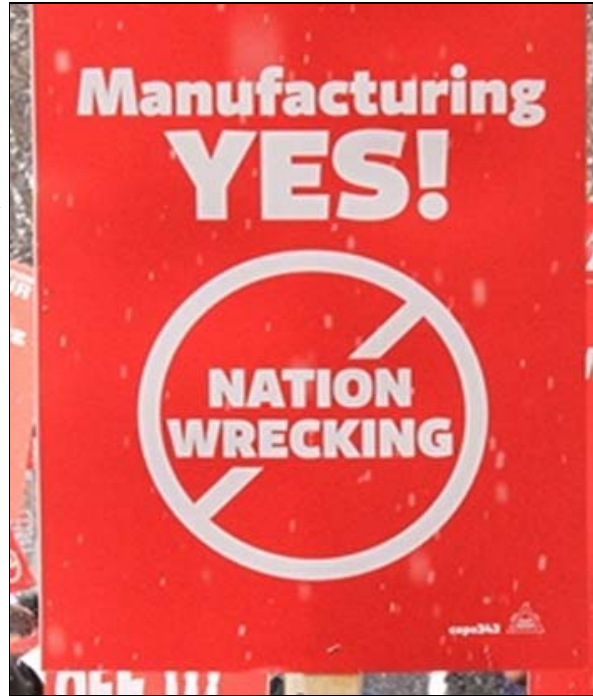


The Campbell Soup Company announced on January 24, its intention to stop production of soup in Canada within the next 18 months. The closure of its only Canadian manufacturing facility, located in Etobicoke, Ontario will put 380 workers out of a job. This act of nation-wrecking, through the destruction of a perfectly good production facility which is part of the Canadian food manufacturing sector, was crassly presented as "the best course of action for our business" as if the decision was a private one with no broad impact on the social economy and people and their food security.

For working people in the Etobicoke-Lakeshore district of Toronto, this is the latest in a long string of nation-wrecking plant closures and demolitions dating back to the introduction of the free-trade agreement with the U.S. in 1988. At that time the area was one of the most highly industrialized in Toronto, with large plants such as Goodyear Tire and Rubber, Anaconda Brass, Continental Can and many more employing thousands of industrial workers producing huge amounts of new value for the

Canadian economy. Since then, one by one, plants have closed and shifted operations to the U.S. or elsewhere. During the recession of 2007-09, ArvinMeritor, an auto parts plant and Consumers Glass, among others, closed down, followed more recently by Mr. Christie's Bakery.

The people of Etobicoke, alongside workers across the country, have voiced their strong opposition to the neo-liberal free trade agreement during and following the 1988 election. They had growing concerns about the neo-liberal direction of the economy and the destruction it would rain down on the economy and their lives. As more and more plants closed down and moved out of the area, workers expressed their alarm and concern, participating in forums and exchanges on how to develop the "local economy" and stop the wrecking. The problem which working people faced then and now is that they have no say or control over these major decisions which have severe consequences on their lives and socialized economy.



In response to the announced closure of the Campbell Soup factory, the local city councillor called it a "devastating loss" and a "truly sad day for the Lakeshore community." This may reflect many people's immediate sentiments, but what is needed -- from municipal, provincial or federal politicians -- is that they take a stand against such nation-wrecking and not simply wring their hands impotently from the sidelines.

In addition to other considerations, Campbell's installed a Combined Heat and Power Plant in 2016, which generates 95 per cent of the electricity required to power the plant through a natural-gas fuelled engine that also produces steam for food processing. The project -- referred to as a co-generation project -- was billed at the time as an important step towards energy efficiency and sustainability. The company received \$5 million in incentives from Ontario Hydro, 40 per cent of the total value of the system's installation -- money that comes out of the added-value Ontario workers produce.

At the time of the Campbell Soup co-generation project start up, the Ontario Liberal Minister of Energy Bob Chiarelli said, "From a business perspective, it just makes sense -- saving energy means saving money and keeping good jobs in Ontario." Yet less than two years later, the company is to be allowed to walk away scot free, and to destroy, as their private property the upgraded plant, a precious asset of the Canadian economy. The local Liberal MPP, who was present for the photo-op at the start-up of the publicly-funded co-generation project, has had nothing to say about the social responsibilities of the company to his constituency or to the Ontario economy since the announced plant closure.

Such a state of affairs is unconscionable. It may be Campbell Soup's legal prerogative to no longer operate a production facility in Canada and leave the country, but a solution is needed to carry on local food and other production in Canada. Why should Campbell Soup, or Heinz or any of the other companies that have shuttered production in Canada, be allowed to carry out such nation-wrecking and then be free to sell commodities from its U.S. plants into the Canadian market? This problem requires discussion and a solution.

The Etobicoke plant may be the "smallest and oldest" in Campbell Soup's empire but it forms part of a whole network of social arrangements within the food industry and social economy in Canada. In addition to the livelihoods of workers at the plant, Campbell's purchases approximately 70 per cent of its produce from farms within a 3.5 hour drive of the Toronto plant. It purchases some 4,800 tonnes of carrots annually from growers in the Holland Marsh area north of Toronto, for whom the loss of these sales will create serious problems, not to mention the transportation and distribution sector that will be affected. At present, farm producers have not negotiated contracts for this year's crop.

In terms of the Lakeshore neighbourhood itself, the Company currently provides food to both the Daily Bread Food Bank, whose warehouse is less than a block from the plant, and to Second Street School. This neighbourhood has some of the poorest postal codes in the Greater Toronto Area. The Campbell's plant also supplies other Canadian food banks.

The problems faced by working people in Etobicoke, as elsewhere in the country, lie with the narrow direction of the economy that serves the rich and their insatiable greed at the expense of the working people. The added-value workers produce must flow back into the economy for its extended reproduction and constant renewal, and into society to meet its general interests. The global monopolies absconding with added-value Canadian workers produce rather than reinvesting it back into the economy should rightly be considered theft which must be stopped. To wreck production and have the assets Canadian workers have built sit idle or be destroyed, without any effort at renewing the facilities or proposing an alternative in the community, is a sign of the necessity for change towards a nation-building project under the control of working people. The irrational situation of nation-wrecking under the control of these global monopolies, serving their narrow private interests, exposes the lack of control Canadian working people have over their own economy and fate. This must change!

It's Time to Change the Direction of the Economy from Enriching the Few to Serving the Working People, Those Who Produce the Social Wealth!

For Your Information: Campbell Soup Company

The Campbell Soup Company plant in Etobicoke has been in operation since 1931, 87 years, at the present location.

The Etobicoke plant is Campbell's only plant in Canada and currently employs just under 600 people full-time. The average age of those working at the plant is 46. Of these, approximately 200 -- who are part of the Canadian headquarters and commercial operations -- will relocate from the Etobicoke plant to another GTA location, which is to include a "food innovation Centre."

Campbell's closed down its plant in Listowel, Ontario in 2009, putting 500 workers out of a job. The plant was the largest employer in the town of 6,500, which is 40 km northwest of Kitchener.

The company employs 18,500 people worldwide. It has plants in Maxton, North Carolina; Napoleon, Ohio; Paris, Texas; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Everett, Washington. Production from the Canadian plant is being transferred to the North Carolina, Ohio and Texas plants -- where the company says it has excess capacity so will not be increasing its workforce significantly. Campbell Soup Company also has a plant in Australia and one in Germany.

Campbell Soup is a U.S. company headquartered in Camden, New York and listed on the stock exchange. It ranks 337 on the Fortune 500 list of biggest industrial corporations. Its yearly sales are approximately \$8 billion. The company owns a number of other brands including Pepperidge Farm,

Goldfish, V8, Prego, Pace, Plum Organics, Bolthouse Farms, and in 2017 purchased Snyder's-Lance and Pacific Foods.



Prince George

University of Northern BC Food Service Workers Rally for Better Wages and Working Conditions



Students, faculty, staff and community members joined together on January 24, in a rally to support the University of Northern BC (UNBC) food service workers from Unite Here Local 40 who are fighting for a new contract. Several of those participating in the rally have been shocked to learn that many of the workers preparing and serving food at UNBC for more than a decade, make less than \$15/hour and have no pension.

Union representative, Harley Augustino and several cafeteria workers spoke of the unacceptable situation they face in terms of current wages and working conditions, and their efforts to obtain a contract agreeable to themselves. They noted that after eight months of bargaining the company has come back with an insulting wage offer. There is some irony in all of this as UNBC proudly announces that it has been named one of BC's best employers. Yet the administration with nary a protest allows the Compass Group multinational to impose such poor wages and working conditions on those who provide the university such a necessary and important service.



Aaron Eckman, secretary-treasurer of the BC Federation of Labour, was the first guest speaker and began by praising the workers for their collective determination and struggle to win a contract they can accept with dignity. In the course of his presentation, he pledged support from thousands of workers across the province, and highlighted the need for UNBC to stand up for its contracted employees. He pointed out that in their fight to raise their standard of living, the workers are helping

the local economy and this should be acknowledged.

Peter Ewart, spokesperson for the Stand Up for the North Committee, noted that the Compass Group -- the contractor for food services at UNBC -- is the largest food service company in the world located in 50 countries with tens of billions of dollars in revenue every year including billions in profits. He said the cafeteria workers are doing exactly what is necessary to end poverty wages and improve working conditions, by mobilizing themselves and working with others at the university and in the broader community to demand a contract acceptable to themselves.



The final speaker was Dawn Hemingway, representing Northern FIRE: The Feminist Institute for Research and Evaluation at UNBC. She spoke about research and community work of the Institute that underlines the significant negative impact of precarious and underpaid employment on the health and wellbeing of workers and their families. She praised the strength and determination of the workers and called on the university administration to come forward in support of the rights and demands of their contracted workers.

Among other organizations represented at the rally were the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the UNBC Faculty Association, Prince George Public Research Interest Group, Northern Women's Centre and BC Government and Service Employees Union.

Responding to UNBC's failure to date to engage with the workers, including refusal (on two occasions) to accept petitions circulated by the workers calling on the university to stand with them, rally participants decided to march to the President's Office and ask for a meeting. After being told the President was out of town, workers asked if he could be brought in by phone but to no avail. A phone call was then made to the Vice President Academic and Provost to request a meeting with him. After some time and negotiation, it was agreed that a delegation and one media representative could meet with three UNBC Vice Presidents.

The impact of that meeting is yet to be seen but several things are clear: support for the workers' just demands is growing on campus and in the broader community, and the food service workers are determined to fight until they receive an acceptable contract.



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