

July 12, 2018

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Their Rights and Dignity**

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## **Goderich Salt Mine Workers and Community Fight for Their Rights and Dignity**

### **Workers Take Action to Block Compass Minerals from Running the Facility with Scabs**



Workers at the U.S.-based Compass Minerals' mine in Goderich have been on strike since April 27. The strike action was taken to stand up against Compass' unacceptable demands for concessions. The company has refused to negotiate and has continued operations using scabs from outside the community.

The striking workers took action on July 4 to prevent the scabs from entering the facilities, as a means to force the company to resume negotiations. Workers erected a blockade with wooden pallets and vehicles to block the entrance to the mine. Meanwhile, they also assembled members and supporters at the dock to ensure no scabs came in via the lake.

The company has been operating with managers and scabs since April 27. Workers report that the scabs arrive in busloads every day, having been flown in mostly from a drilling company in New Brunswick along with a number of others from Quebec. When the workers began erecting the blockade over thirty scabs were inside the mine facilities. They were later escorted out by the workers who chanted "Solidarity! Do Not Come Back!"

Two days later on July 6, Compass Minerals filed for and obtained a court order stipulating striking workers must remove their blockade of pallets and vehicles by the next day at 4:30 pm. The workers complied but shortly after the barricade came down a cavalcade of farm tractors started arriving to block access to the facility. Compass Minerals obtained a new court order on July 9 forcing the removal of the tractors from the entrance to the





company's facilities. The tractors left and the following day an agreement was reached between Unifor and Compass Minerals to resume negotiations on July 12 and that during negotiations workers will allow access to the mine.



The resolve of the workers is strong as the concessions the company is demanding would seriously impact working conditions, especially health and safety conditions. Hundreds of workers have come from across Ontario to support the just struggle of the Goderich workers and are taking part in actions that have now become a 24/7 vigil in defence of their rights. The resolve of the community is also strong. The community sees the fight of the Compass mine workers as their own and daily events are being organized in which large numbers of people, including children, participate.



Gary Lynch, President of Unifor Local 16-0, the union representing the Goderich workers, explained in a video the issue of forced overtime, which is one of the major issues in the dispute: "Sixty-hour work week, into another sixty-hour work week followed by a third sixty-hour work week, and the fourth week is 72 hours. You can be disciplined and fired, terminated, if you do not make those shifts. That is just a start as we are up against a corporation that is from the United States of America that does not care about an individual's right. That is what we are facing. Take it or leave it. That is the way we are being treated. This is the mother ship right here. That is why they are attacking it because it lines up with all the other little places in Canada; Unity [in Saskatchewan], Amherst [Nova Scotia], our sister plant here in town, and that is where they are going to hit next."

Another worker explained in the same video that in a Compass Louisiana plant the workers are forced to work 12 hour shifts with four hours of compulsory overtime, six or even seven days a

week. The concessions Compass demands here in Goderich could result in a similar situation being imposed if the company were to succeed.

Support the just struggle of the Goderich workers and their community for their rights and dignity! Follow the workers' lead! Defend the rights of all! Messages of support can be sent to: [president@unifor16.ca](mailto:president@unifor16.ca).



(Photos: Unifor)



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**ABI Owners in Bécancour Demand More Concessions  
from Locked-Out Workers**

**Oppose the Anti-Social Dictate of the  
Alcoa-Rio Tinto Cartel!**

**- Pierre Chénier -**



**Solidarity rally at Bécancour aluminum smelter, March 23, 2018.**

The Alcoa-Rio Tinto lockout of 1,030 workers at the Bécancour aluminum smelter (ABI) in Quebec has now lasted six months. The ABI management is now piling on its concessionary demands. During mediation talks with government-appointed mediator Lucien Bouchard, the former premier



of Quebec and former national leader of the Bloc québécois, management used the occasion not to reach an agreement but to make additional demands.

Smelter workers report ABI now wants a 20 per cent net cut of union certified jobs currently contained in the collective agreement. ABI wants to replace work under the collective agreement with non-union contracted out or occasional workers under conditions clearly inferior to those of unionized workers. Workers also report that the company wants to backtrack on elements that have already been settled. At a general assembly, ABI workers massively rejected these provocations and demanded negotiations resume in good faith to arrive at an agreement acceptable to them.

The 20 per cent cut in union jobs at the smelter means ABI management wants to begin immediately its major restructuring threatened last March. At that time, ABI suddenly withdrew its former offer from the bargaining table under the hoax that workers' actions prior to the lockout in 2017 had caused unspecified damage to the smelter. Instead of negotiating in good faith and concluding an agreement that was well within reach, ABI threatened an anti-worker restructuring and filed a \$19-million damage grievance against Local 9700 and its executive. This deliberate diversion prolonged the lockout and forced the union to fight the unfounded and fraudulent grievance.



After six months of lockout, the new restructuring demand is a brutal attack on workers and the community. The loss of 200 bargaining unit jobs would significantly reduce the unionized workforce. Aside from everything else, the loss of union positions would make it more difficult to wage an effective struggle in defence of workers' rights to maintain a certain equilibrium between the cartel, which takes its orders from who knows where to serve its private global interests, and the workers, their community and the people of Quebec.



ABI is the region's largest employer. Such a cut in unionized workers would mean a significant drop in conditions at the plant and an impoverishment of the region through an increase in precarious work with inferior wages without a defined-benefit pension plan. This amounts to a significant transfer of the new value ABI workers produce out of the region and into the global cartel's coffers. This long-term loss is compounded in the immediate term with the loss of revenue suffered by workers hired by subcontractors and suppliers who have been laid off since the lockout. The

media have reported that many of the laid-off workers have now exhausted or will soon exhaust their employment insurance benefits.

On top of the enormous losses in the community during the lockout, the steelworkers' union now estimates ABI has reneged on paying Hydro Québec close to \$108 million. The contract for the

supply of electricity between the government, Hydro Québec and ABI stipulates, amongst other things, that a strike or a lockout is considered a "force majeure" and relieves the company of its obligation to pay for the block of energy reserved for it, although the power has already been planned for and produced.

The long list of anti-social actions of the global Alcoa-Rio Tinto cartel includes the refusal to pay students it hires the same rate as occasional workers. The Quebec Human Rights and Youth Rights Tribunal recently rendered a decision ordering ABI to pay students the same rate as occasional workers, which ABI is appealing.

Clearly, the private interests that control Alcoa and Rio Tinto are obsessed with their own narrow interests, which clash with the individual and collective interests of the working people and the general interests of society. They could care less about the lockout harming the interests of 1,030 workers and their community, the theft of electricity from Hydro Québec and the loss of value for the local, regional and Quebec economy.

This clash of interests is evident in an ABI communiqué attempting to justify its demand for a 20 per cent cut in unionized jobs:

"At present, ABI has an opportunity to adjust its organizational structure without layoffs as a result of a wave of retirements. This year, management at ABI carried out an in-depth comparative analysis to test and assess numerous ideas on how to improve the plant. The portion of the aluminium smelter presently in operation is effective and produces an unequalled level of metal purity. The changes proposed for a new contract are competitive, equitable and in line with Quebec's aluminium industry."

The focus of Alcoa-Rio Tinto is entirely on expropriating value from the ABI smelter and Hydro Québec and removing it to serve its global private interests. The focus quite obviously is not on the well-being of the Quebec working people and pouring new value workers produce back into the extended reproduction of the local and Quebec economy.

ABI says, "The portion of the aluminium smelter presently in operation is effective and produces an unequalled level of metal purity." This language referring to production during the lockout is similar to what Rio Tinto said of production during its six month lockout of Alma workers in 2012. When the Alma workers went back to work, it took them around one year of sustained struggle to re-establish the health and safety conditions in place prior to the lockout. The "effective operation" and "unequalled purity" had been attained through the dismantling of most health and safety measures and conditions during the lockout.



The fraud of the ABI communiqué emerges from the imperialist aim behind the demands to guarantee the viability of the plant. Global cartels, such as Alcan-Rio Tinto, use their power to extract concessions wherever they operate. They use lockouts and other means to maximize the amount of value they expropriate and to manipulate market prices to their advantage. Their actions

arising from their imperialist aim provoke and contribute to recurring economic crises and unresolved problems that plague the economy and society. Their obsession with their own narrow private interests is incompatible with the socialized economy in which their businesses operate, which demands all-sided cooperation and distribution of the value workers produce to diversify and strengthen the economy and humanize the social and natural environment.

The demand for restructuring and the criminalization of workers who defend their rights have nothing to do with negotiating a collective agreement. They are the words and deeds of dictators bent on sabotaging a civilized negotiation process to bring equilibrium into relations of production. The words and deeds of Alcoa-Rio Tinto are a direct threat to the well-being of working people and the viability of Quebec's socialized economy. They are altogether unacceptable and the workers deserve support for doing everything in their power to defeat them. Workers in Quebec and other places are taking concrete measures to provide the ABI workers and their community with assistance. By relying on our collective strength, we defeat defeatism. This is the way to go!

(Photos: WF, Metallos)



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## Interview, Clément Masse, President, United Steelworkers Local 9700

**Workers' Forum:** The union held a general membership meeting on July 3 concerning new demands from the owners of the ABI smelter who have locked out the workers since January 11. Can you tell us more about the situation?

**Clément Masse:** We took a break from the mediation that is taking place with former Quebec premier Lucien Bouchard as mediator. We held a general membership meeting to seek confirmation from our members of our position in the negotiations. The workers confirmed the position we held since December when the employer left the bargaining table. We rejected the offer at that time but we indicated that we were close to an agreement. At the July 3 meeting, the workers confirmed that we want to return to the table and finish negotiations by picking it up where it was in December. The vote of confidence and support for the bargaining committee taken at the meeting was 90 per cent with a turnout of approximately 80 per cent of union members.



It is not usual to do this, but the employer came up with new demands at the bargaining table that are unacceptable. We organized the membership meeting to confirm our mandate. Although it has been six months since we were locked out the workers are behind us. They are still strong. Morale is good. The workers are not on their knees. If the employer thought they could toss the union aside and sow division among our members, they were wrong.

The main new demand from the employer is to cut 20 per cent of jobs that, according to the



collective agreement, belong to the bargaining unit. They want to cut jobs by attrition, up to 20 per cent of ABI positions that are protected under our collective agreement. This demand affects workers, of course, and it also affects the community, because the employer wants to give itself the discretion to replace those jobs with subcontracted or casual jobs, precarious jobs. It is like making the community pay for the employer's bad decision to lock us out. It is they who made the decision to organize a lockout, not us. They do not have to make the community pay for that. In December, the employer made a final offer to achieve its productivity aims. We agreed to discuss this demand. There is no need for the company to cut 20 per cent of the jobs unless it is to punish the community and the workers for its own bad decisions.

The employer is also questioning several things that were already settled in the previous negotiations. We do not accept this new demand nor do we agree to backtrack on what has already been settled. It is not serious after six months of lockout to behave like this. We want to hold real negotiations at the table and end this conflict that is harmful to the employer, workers and community.

We informed the mediator of the results of the membership meeting on July 6. We are taking a break from mediation for the week. Our picket lines remain strong; workers are calm.

(Photo: FTQ)



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## Alexandre Fréchette, President, United Steelworkers Local 9490 Speaks to *Workers' Forum*



**Locked-Out Steelworkers protest at ABI shareholders meeting in Pittsburgh, May 9, 2018.**

*Local 9490 represents workers at the Rio Tinto aluminum smelter in Alma, Quebec. President Fréchette explained to Workers' Forum the efforts of his local and others to defend fellow workers locked out from their smelter Aluminerie de Bécancour (ABI) since January 11.*

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I believe that ABI has galvanized the workers and the union with the company's new demand for a



cut in the collective agreement of 20 per cent of the jobs that are certified union jobs. The union received a 90 per cent vote of confidence after six months of conflict that included the rejection of this new demand by ABI. That is quite a message the members have sent. There is real determination displayed by this vote.

I think that what the company just did is not going to be to its advantage. If it wanted to test the water, members sent the message that they will only consider an offer that fully satisfies them. I think it is a strategic mistake on the part of the company. What the company wanted to do was scare the workers. Its aim was to weaken the morale of the membership. With a 90 per cent vote, that failed.

The workers are determined to satisfy their demands, which in my opinion are fully justified. The company will end up with union interlocutors who are even less inclined to compromise on their demands. The company challenged the union bargaining committee and I think they shot themselves in the foot. This makes settlement more difficult for ABI.

The workers' vote, after months of lockout, is a matter of great pride for me. For the labour movement, this is a message to all the companies like this one. If the company does not take note of it, it will be difficult for them because the union has more and more support. I believe that this is the conflict in Quebec over the last ten years that has the broadest support from the other unions in Quebec. ABI workers have mobilized and supported other workers in their struggles and they are now receiving that support back.

The financial support barometer is there but it is not just about money. There are plenty of people who are following what is happening and who support the ABI workers in many ways, including financially. Alcoa-Rio Tinto (the joint owners of ABI) needs to take note of the powerful message that the union members just sent. It needs to sit down at the bargaining table and negotiate seriously and find a settlement because it will become more difficult otherwise. Alcoa-Rio Tinto must stop gambling that workers are going to collapse because it will not happen. It has to stop thinking about scaring people. It must abandon these manipulative schemes because in any case the issue will have to be sorted out at the bargaining table.



As far as we are concerned, we feel a strong bond with the workers of ABI. We stay close. We keep ourselves informed. This dispute is our dispute. We have raised support everywhere. The aluminum unions from coast to coast support them. ABI workers have received financial support from workers at the Kitimat smelter on the west coast, all the way to the Baie Comeau aluminum smelter, the easternmost smelter in Canada. This support is precedent-setting. As far as we are concerned, we are doing everything we can to get support. It is a reflex that we are developing that goes beyond Alcoa and Rio Tinto.

What we are doing, and for us the eye opener was the lockout in Alma in 2012, is saying that support must be automatic, that when one member of your family is fighting you go to your members, explain the issues, and get a recurring financial contribution.[1] You have to come up with a mechanism whereby if you are ready to fight, do not worry, the aluminum unions are going to be behind you. It is the case in aluminum and it is also being developed in steel, in other big multinationals.

Even the small locals where people do not earn a lot of money are making recurring contributions. Brick by brick, in the end we will have built a wall against these companies. And there will be others after. In Alma, we voted for a support fund for the other unions so that it would be automatic. We increased our dues so that we are able to help workers who are fighting. We give \$25 per worker per week to the ABI workers, a sum of \$15,000 a week. Arvida (smelter local) gives \$20,000 a week. All aluminum unions give a recurring amount. The importance of it being recurrent money is that the workers can plan and the companies can no longer bet on the financial capacity of an individual union to fight these battles head-on. Workers suffer a loss of income but they are not in the street, they can plan things and keep fighting as long as it is needed. This is well established now in the Steelworkers' union and because of our 2012 conflict we have developed links with other unions and we are trying to get it going everywhere. There is no need for these to be huge amounts. They can be modest amounts but recurring. This is to prevent a trade union that has chosen to fight from being forced to accept concessions for financial reasons.

Regarding the conflict at ABI, the quicker that Alcoa-Rio Tinto takes note of the message sent to them, the sooner it sits down at the table with a serious mandate, the better it will be. Its negotiators will talk with people who are open-minded, who are able to find solutions to the conflict so that communities, workers, cities, the Mauricie and eventually Quebec stop suffering from this hostage-taking.

### **Note**

1. Workers at the Rio Tinto aluminum smelter in Alma, Lac-Saint-Jean went through a 6-month lockout in 2012. They mobilized strong support in Quebec and throughout Canada, including steelworkers at U.S. Steel in Hamilton and internationally. With financial and other assistance from fellow workers, Alma workers were particularly successful in restricting the subcontracting of their jobs to workers who would have worked side by side with them doing the same tasks but at wages and working conditions drastically inferior.

*(Photos: Metallos)*



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## **Coquitlam Strike Struggle Continues**

# **BC Casino Workers Reject Tentative Agreement**

**- Brian Sproule -**

Striking casino workers at Hard Rock Casino in Coquitlam, BC have rejected a tentative mediated agreement between their union, the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) and the parent company, Great Canadian Gaming Corporation. The approximately 400 workers who attend table games and slot machines as well as work in the kitchen, guest services, the count room, theatre and security walked off the job on May 11 this year. They are seeking wages and benefits acceptable to themselves, as well as improved working conditions and working hours. Some of the workers have not had wage increases for over ten years and must hold down other jobs to make ends meet. Frequently workers are sent home in mid shift. Casino workers generally throughout BC are paid wages only marginally above the legal minimum wage of \$12.65 per hour yet live in a province with skyrocketing housing and other costs of living.





**Workers from other unions join in solidarity rally with Hard Rock Casino workers, May 25, 2018.**

The workers joined the BCGEU in May 2016 and have been trying to negotiate a first contract since January 2017. The company refuses to offer wages and benefits acceptable to the workers despite announcing a 62 per cent increase in gross income for the first quarter of this year over the same period last year. In February the workers voted 99.5 per cent in favour of job action.



BCGEU president Stephanie Smith is quoted in the *Tri-City News* July 6 saying, "They voted to reject the agreement and continue to fight on the picket lines and I support them on that. There was too much uncertainty around job protection and layoffs." The workers believe the company intends to phase out gaming tables in favour of less work intensive slot machines resulting in numerous layoffs and mostly lower paid jobs.

Several days after the strike began the company resumed operations but activists from the Workers' Centre of CPC (M-L) noted numerous vehicles turning around and leaving after the occupants discussed the situation with the determined picketers. Parking lots appear to be largely empty and strikers report that business has become significantly less than usual.

Meanwhile, resistance to low pay and poor working conditions throughout the casino sector has spread to the Okanagan. Casino workers in Vernon, Kelowna, Penticton and Kamloops, also members of the BCGEU, went on strike on June 29. The 700 workers voted 93 per cent in favour of

job action to defend their rights and dignity in opposition to the intransigence of the owners, Gateway Casinos and Entertainment.

The casino and entertainment business is very profitable but the owners and operators are consumed with the aim to expropriate as much profit as possible at the expense of their workers. The owners reject the workers' claim for dignified working and living conditions. Workers are entirely just in organizing and fighting to defend their rights. People should actively support fellow workers on strike and boycott those businesses behind a picket line until workers have reached a settlement agreeable to themselves and return to work. With mutual support and solidarity, working people can increase their collective and individual strength in the struggle to defend the rights of all.

The 400 Hard Rock Casino workers and the 700 striking workers in the Okanagan are defending themselves and their rights. Their courageous refusal to be pressured into giving up their just struggle inspires others who face their predicament in BC. Service workers throughout BC in all its varied sectors are determined to organize powerful expressions of what they deserve by right. This is how to defend not only their rights but the rights of all. They deserve the support of all BC unions and working people.



**Striking casino workers at Playtime Casino in Kelowna picket, July 4, 2018.**

*(Photos: BCGEU)*



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