

July 19, 2018

## **Goderich Salt Mine Workers Ratify Tentative Agreement Ending Their Strike**

# **Miners Go Back to Work with Heads Held High, United with Community**



Community rally July 14, 2018 in support of striking salt mine workers.

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## **Goderich Salt Mine Workers Ratify Tentative Agreement Ending Their Strike**

### **Miners Go Back to Work with Heads Held High, United with Community**



Three hundred and fifty workers at the salt mine in Goderich, southwestern Ontario, ratified a collective agreement with Compass Minerals on July 16. Unifor Local 16-0 had reached a tentative agreement with the U.S.-based company two days earlier.

The workers' ratification officially ends their strike in defence of their rights that began on April 27. The salt mine workers, with the active support of the community, waged a determined struggle against company demands for drastic concessions on almost all significant aspects of their existing collective agreement. The company wanted concessions on pensions, benefits, hours of work and the ability to subcontract at will, force mandatory overtime and so on. The bitter strike struggle included, in the week leading to the tentative agreement, a pitched battle by the workers and the community to prevent the company from running the mine with scabs and to force it to negotiate.

No negotiations had taken place between April 27 and July 12. The company refused to talk to the workers and kept provoking them in the most egregious way with the massive use of scabs flown in from as far away as New Brunswick and Quebec. The people in the community have no doubt in their minds that the mass actions organized by the striking miners and their supporters to prevent scabs from entering the premises were instrumental in forcing Compass back to the negotiating table.

Throughout the struggle, hundreds of workers from across Ontario joined the Goderich workers and the families and children of the community participating in rallies, picnics and eventually the militant blockade that blocked the scabs and prevented the company from producing. The militant collective actions of the workers and their allies smashed any atmosphere of defeatism that the company was attempting to instil so as to eliminate workers' defence of their rights.



Representatives of Local 16-0 and Unifor officials said workers were able to fend off the most drastic concession the owners were demanding. This was the imposition of monthly work weeks of one totalling 72 hours and three others with 60 hours plus mandatory overtime. Compass gave the typical neo-liberal arguments for the punitive work schedule, which would make life difficult for workers, in the service of the company's drive for greater productivity. The workers refused to accept the twisted anti-social logic of the company and defended themselves through the strike struggle.

Workers say the new agreement contains both 8 hour and 12 hour shifts but with no week reaching 72 hours, and no mandatory overtime. Voluntary overtime pay will be increased to double the hourly rate. The agreement does include concessions relating to assignment of work and "flexible work practices," which empower the company to move workers around under the anti-social line of making operations more productive, efficient and effective on the backs of those who do the work.

Although the text of the agreement has not been made public, according to workers the company's other concessionary demands have been withdrawn. Among other demands, the company wanted to weaken the existing contracting-out provisions, reduce the time for long-term disability and eliminate an early retirement provision in the contract. The union says the three-year deal includes a 2.5 per cent wage increase this year and next, and a three per cent increase in 2020.



When workers announced to the community that they had ratified the tentative agreement and were going back to work with their heads held high, people greeted them with vigorous applause. The collective sense is that because the community had been fully engaged in the salt workers' fight in defence of their rights and dignity, the result means the entire mining community has defended its dignity and has well positioned itself for further battles with the oligarchs who currently control the people's salt resource and mining operations.

"We want to thank the people of Goderich and all the union members who stood with us on this

picket line, but most of all I want to thank our members and their families who stood strong with our bargaining committee through 12 long weeks," said Gary Lynch, President of Local 16-O.

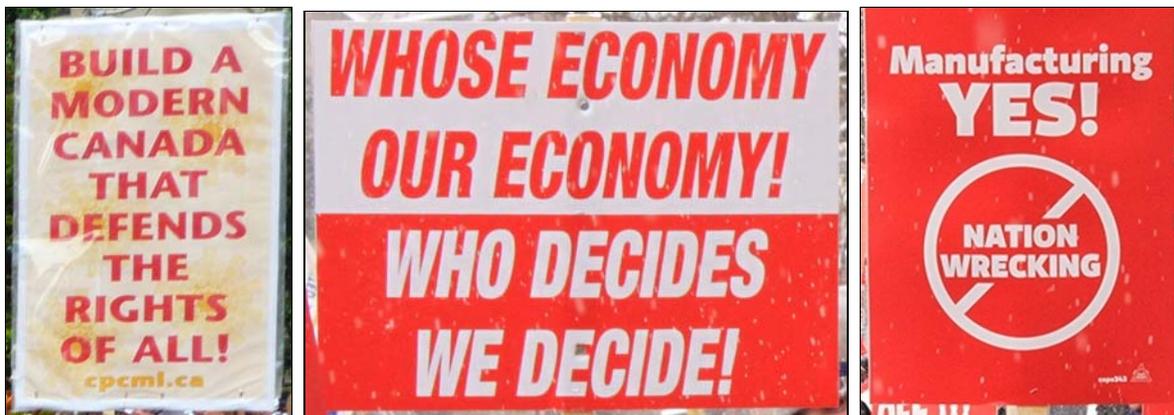


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**Wrecking of Canada Must Not Pass!**

## **Greyhound Shutdown Must Be Presented to the People for Discussion and Action**

*- Dougal MacDonald -*



Greyhound Canada announced on July 9, the imminent shutdown of all bus routes in Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba and Northern Ontario west of Sudbury -- and all but one in BC. If the company has its way, the cessation of bus operations on those routes will occur on October 31. Greyhound attributed the decision to a 41 per cent ridership decrease since 2010, competition from subsidized carriers, expansion of low-cost airlines, regulatory constraints, and increased car ownership. Four hundred and fifteen workers will lose their jobs if this wrecking occurs as planned.

Greyhound is engaged in nation-wrecking. One of the ways that this nation-wrecking is taking place is by minimizing its extent. Mention is made of the complete cancellation in western Canada but service is to be maintained in Ontario. What Greyhound and the national media do not say is that service is to be maintained in southern Ontario but cancelled in almost all of Northern Ontario (one overnight trip to Toronto and one to Ottawa remain). With this sleight of hand the concerns and interests of the working people and Indigenous people of Northern Ontario are negated and eliminated from the Canadian polity. This must change.

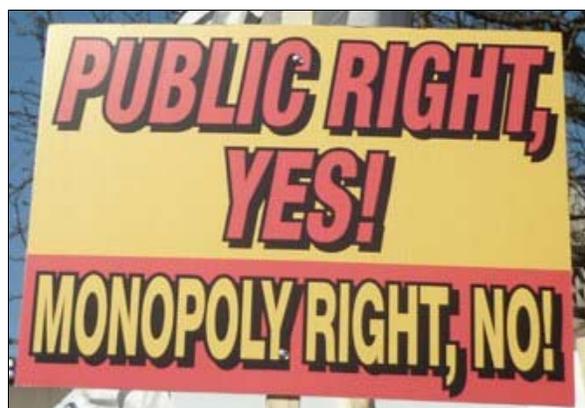
Public opposition to the announcement was swift. Many point out that rural areas will lose a very important low-priced transportation service affecting seniors, students, the poor, and people with medical issues. Others highlight the reality that a bus shutdown will further endanger Indigenous women and girls living in remote areas thereby depriving them of a means of safe, reliable transportation to medical appointments and, if living outside their communities, to return home for funerals and other important matters.



Greyhound's most recent decision to close routes in western Canada is yet another example of how self-serving actions by foreign monopolies operating in Canada can have disastrous effects on the local and broader economy. Other recent examples include the decision by U.S. Steel to permanently close the blast furnace at the Hamilton Works steel mill, the announcement by the U.S. financial oligarchy of the closings of the Heinz vegetable plant in Leamington, Ontario, and Kellogg's plant in London, Ontario.

The foreign owners of Greyhound say their decisions are private business matters concerning their investments and are not negotiable. They declare with the arrogance of unaccountable dictators that their decisions are in the best interests of the private owners of the company and any collateral wrecking of the Canadian economy and harm to the people is excusable. According to them, their first responsibility is to their ownership groups who expect the highest return possible on their investments. If the oligarchs become richer, neo-liberalism contends the people will eventually benefit from the trickling down of social wealth. When facts are presented to refute their nonsense and that social, environmental and economic problems are festering without solutions, the oligarchs and their political representative simply bleat louder and retreat to their gated mansions protected by private and state armies.

The British monopoly FirstGroup bought majority control of Greyhound in 2007. English billionaire oligarch Sir Moir Lockhead founded FirstGroup in 1995 and was its Chief Executive and Deputy Chairman until eight years ago. FirstGroup originated from then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberal deregulation of bus services in the United Kingdom in 1986, whereby privately-controlled social wealth purchased nationalized and municipal bus operators. Those who currently own and control FirstGroup are the individuals who have decided to shut down the western Canadian Greyhound routes although none of them has the remotest stake in or connection with the communities involved or even with Canada for that matter, other than as an economy to exploit.



For their part, the federal and provincial governments generally take the attitude that these decisions to wreck the economy and damage people's lives are private business matters. The existing public authority defends dominant private interests and monopoly property right, not public right. Governments insist they have no right, authority or inclination to interfere or change the decisions

that private companies make, or do not make, even though those decisions may devastate the economy and harm the well-being and rights of the people.

Greyhound has made the decision to end bus service in western Canada to serve the narrow private interests of those who own and control the company. Neither Greyhound nor any public authority has even bothered to present for discussion, let alone action, an alternative to the shutdown that would serve the local and broader Canadian economy and public interests. If governments refuse to take any action in defence of public right, clearly the working class through its own organizations and media must rally the people to change the situation. Private business decisions that affect the public interest must not be made with impunity, much less implemented. This destructive Greyhound decision and other similar wrecking must not pass. This private decision of oligarchs must become a target of public discussion and action seeking an alternative that serves the public interest. The working people can change the situation with collective actions with analysis that assert public right in opposition to the narrow private interests of the oligarchs.



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## **Quebec Crane Operators Defend Their Rights and Safety and that of the Public Self-Serving and Twisted Logic and Actions of the Rulers**

*- Pierre Chénier -*



**Crane operators rally against changes to training requirements outside Head Office of the Quebec Construction Commission, Montreal, June 21, 2018.**

The twisted and self-serving logic of the Quebec Construction Commission (CCQ) and government must be exposed and denounced to advance support for the just struggle of the Quebec crane operators. The reasoning to justify the unilateral change in the regulations governing the training of crane operators falls apart under scrutiny.

The CCQ document "Regulatory Impact Assessment" published in April 2017 begins by describing the crane operator trade as "locked." The CCQ implies the trade is inaccessible to other construction workers already on site and to youth who want to join the trade without having to obtain the 870-hour diploma of vocational studies offered by the Ministry of Education.

From the assertion of the trade being locked, the CCQ leaps to the conclusion that the crane operators are creating a problem during periods when construction companies say they cannot find

enough workers in particular trades. Those companies complain that the 870-hour diploma regulation for new crane operators has created a problem because more companies have purchased cranes of less than 30 tonne capacity, referred to as boom trucks, to move heavy material. They want any construction worker on site to operate those cranes even though such cranes have a terrible history of accidents, especially before the introduction of the 870-hour diploma regulation.



The CCQ writes: "Because of the punctual nature of the use of a boom truck during a day, construction companies are often unable to hire a crane operator for a few hours to operate it. This is due to a lack of availability or interest on the part of crane operators, or because of the high cost to companies, as they must deal with crane rental companies for short loading and unloading operations. **Most contractors use the services of a person with a certificate of competency other than that of a crane operator** to do their work and operate these low tonnage trucks." (*Emphasis added.*)

The CCQ admits that construction contractors are openly breaking the law with impunity. Certain companies are asking untrained workers to operate these cranes. Construction workers

themselves note these low tonnage trucks are the most dangerous and the most likely to tip, and that a great majority of accidents happens with this type of crane.

Neither does the CCQ hold contractors to account for breaking the law nor does it feel moved to enforce the law. Instead, it and the government have moved to unilaterally change the regulation and destroy the effectiveness of the 870-hour diploma by making it voluntary. In doing so, they blame the workers themselves as displaying a "lack of interest" in solving problems that arise in the industry, which is also a complete fabrication. The construction workers and their unions have always been completely open to strengthening health and safety regulations and their enforcement.

How can earning a crane operator Vocational Studies Diploma, which has been documented as reducing accidents, be considered bad because it "locks up" the trade to new entrants? Is a surgeon not required to obtain a degree to practice the trade of operating on people? Of course it could be said this "locks up" the number of surgeons to those deemed competent and authorized by a public authority to practice the trade. To increase the number of surgeons should the public authority eliminate or weaken the surgical training? Is that the answer? And this is not a flippant comparison. The construction industry is the most dangerous of all regarding death, injuries and job-related illness. The requirement for trade certificates generally, and a diploma for crane operators specifically, ensures a certain defined objective level of competence. But also, it provides some assurance that those practicing the trade are confident in their ability to say *No* to unsafe practices, which companies may want to impose under competitive pressure to increase productivity, or sheer avarice to expropriate more of the new value workers produce.

In a very cynical fashion, the CCQ turns the truth on its head as it tries to justify its unilateral action in introducing a change in regulations while excluding workers from participating in the decision-making process and dismissing the necessity to obtain their consent. The CCQ writes:

Maintaining the status quo could have significant consequences, notably for the safety of

boom truck operators and teams working alongside them. Maintaining the way in which things are done will also not allow construction companies to reduce the administrative burden placed upon them through the hiring and layoff of employees for only a few hours of work per day. Furthermore, this also results in a loss of productivity on work sites for contractors, and therefore a loss of revenue. Other than the risks associated with a shortage in qualified crane operator labour, the industry could maintain current practice by having the identified equipment operated by employees of the industry that do not have the required qualifications. This would increase the risks to health and safety, both for themselves as well as for other workers on site, and would lead to even more situations where companies find themselves in contravention of Bill R-20 and its regulations.

The CCQ says contractors are being forced to break the law and are justified in doing so, as the crane operator's trade is too protected through the existing safety regulation. Do CCQ members make the same argument to a police officer who wants to ticket them for speeding and running a red light? The existing speed limit and red light rule are too restrictive! I'm late for an important meeting!

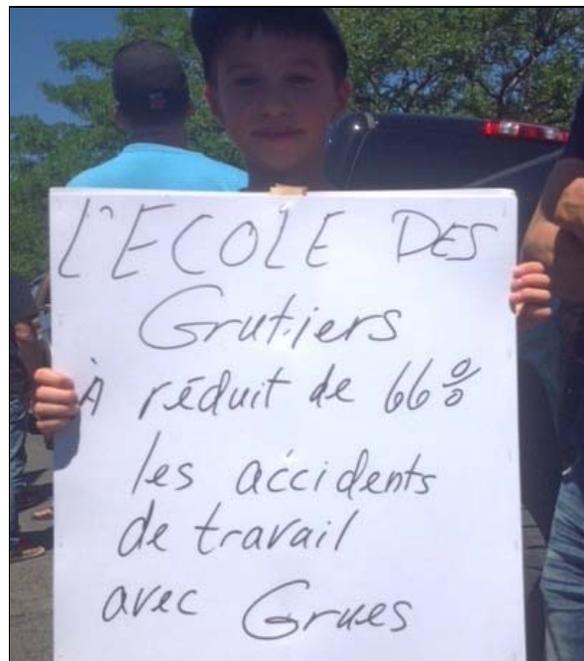
What is the solution when a justifiable problem has been identified? Certainly not to have the law and the safety regulation weakened or not enforced and to refuse to discuss how to deal with the increased use of cranes in the construction sector with those involved, the crane operators and other concerned parties. The increased use of cranes should mean heightened concern to ensure the trade qualifications of crane operators are respected and improved for the well-being of all.

The so-called solution imposed by the CCQ and the government is to eliminate the obligatory nature of vocational training. Very convenient indeed when everyone knows the construction sector is notorious for violating even existing regulations.

As for boom truck operation, the new unilateral regulation, which does not have the input and consent of crane operators or their union, eliminates the necessity of acquiring a 870-hour diploma taught by professional instructors. It establishes an 80-hour course offered by the CCQ following which the new crane operator handles the truck without any further professional supervision.

As for the crane operator trade *per se*, beyond boom trucks, the CCQ and the government have chosen to set up some 150 hours of company training to compete with vocational training, which has become voluntary. In fact, those 150 hours are made up of 150 company work-hours within which training takes place, which in reality represents a lot less than 150 hours of training in a closed site with professional instructors.

Relaxed regulations and a two-tier training system are being implemented to increase competition among workers and lower not only safety standards, but also wages and other working conditions on worksites. The reality will be that many of the new crane operators will be paid at their primary trade's rates, which are often lower than the rates paid to regular crane operators.



All this, which is very inferior both in quantity and quality of the training for a diploma, is being

forced on those who do the work, without their consent or that of their collective. This also weakens the capacity of those doing the work to resist unsafe practices imposed on them at job sites.

The CCQ and government consider this the new normal to be implemented not just in construction but everywhere. The unilateral changes have nothing to do with a sudden or occasional lack of trained workers, as the new regulation and training are permanent and apply under all circumstances.

In the past, crane operators assisted in dealing with situations of specific lack of trained operators when they occurred, for example through interrupting vocational student training during certain periods of time, so that students could join the crane operators on site, with the support of the union. However the CCQ and the government are not interested in solutions that benefit the workers and the public at large.

The twisted neo-liberal logic of the CCQ and the Quebec government is aimed at intensifying the expropriation by the big construction companies of the new value construction workers create. The new normal, which includes anti-worker Bill 152, breeds a climate of lawlessness where companies and state agencies are able to commit crimes with impunity, while the workers who resist are criminalized.

Workers and their organizations from all sectors of the economy must express their firm support for the just struggle of the crane operators and their union. It is a matter of upholding the rights and dignity of all workers. No time or space should be given to defeatism in the ranks of the workers' movement. The unilateral anti-worker action of the CCQ and government can be defeated.



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## Note to Readers

With this issue, *Workers' Forum* will take a break and resume publication on Labour Day, September 3. Please continue to send reports, photographs and concerns during this period. We wish all our readers a happy and productive summer. Stay safe!

With best wishes,

*Workers' Forum Editorial and Technical Staff*



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