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Lockout at the ABI Smelter in Bécancour, Quebec
Steelworkers Launch Global Campaign
to Force Alcoa to Negotiate a Collective
Agreement Acceptable to the Workers



Local 9700 President Clément Masse speaks to USW policy conference,
Vancouver, April 4, 2019.

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Lockout at the ABI Smelter in Bécancour, Quebec

Steelworkers Launch Global Campaign to Force Alcoa to Negotiate a Collective Agreement Acceptable to the Workers



United Steelworkers policy conference delegates on their feet in support of the locked-out Bécancour aluminum smelter workers, April 4, 2019.

The United Steelworkers National Policy Conference held in Vancouver from April 2 to 5, announced a worldwide campaign against the Alcoa/Rio Tinto cartel lockout of ABI aluminum smelter workers in Bécancour, Quebec. The lockout has now lasted 15 months. The USW demands the cartel end the lockout and negotiate a collective agreement acceptable to the workers. The global campaign will focus on exposing the anti-worker practices of Alcoa, which owns 75 per cent of ABI.

USW International President Leo Gerard pledged to organize actions in the countries where Alcoa has facilities, suppliers and customers to force the company to give up its dictate against ABI workers and to begin negotiations. Action began when a USW delegation from Canada attended the National Conference of the Australian Workers' Union on April 7-9. The delegation included USW Canadian Director Ken Neumann and two representatives of the ABI workers, including Local 9700 President Clément Masse. Quebec Steelworkers Director Alain Croteau also announced that locked-out ABI workers will travel to Pittsburgh on May 8 to intervene at the Alcoa shareholders' meeting.



United Steelworkers delegation participates in National Conference of the Australian Workers' Union, April 7-9, 2019.

Clément Masse delivered a speech to the more than 600 delegates at the USW Vancouver conference explaining that at no time since the beginning of the dispute has ABI management negotiated with the union representing the ABI workers. Masse said that every offer from ABI management has been presented as "final" and that the workers must take it or suffer the consequences of a lockout. None of these final offers was the result of negotiations between the two parties. The most recent "final offer" presented in March gave the axe to all the working conditions currently in the collective agreement, be it the pension plan, the number of unionized jobs, the hours of work, the organization of the work, and union leave, Masse said. Alcoa amended the terms of the agreement so as to give the power to ABI executives to make the changes it wished without the union being able to challenge them, bypassing the established process of filing grievances. The same was true of the back-to-work protocol, which had never been discussed with the union. The dictated protocol, which workers massively voted down, was one-sided to the extent the company gave itself the right to suspend or even cancel it at any time.



Clément Masse (centre) at Vancouver policy conference, April 4, 2019, with United Steelworkers Canadian Director Ken Neumann (left) and Quebec Steelworkers Director Alain Croteau.

"They took a position to break the union, to attack the heart of our union," Clément Masse told delegates. "We are a strong union that stands up to the employer. We confront the employer when needed and we have been fighting all the while to uphold our collective agreement and make sure that our members are respected. With this offer from the employer, we could no longer do our union work. This is not just a fight for us. I think this attack on our union is an attack on the whole labour movement in Quebec and in Canada. If the employer breaks us, the employers will take this as a model and try to spread it all over Quebec and across Canada. We will never stop fighting. We are asking for your support and we will ask you again. We will fight until we get a negotiated contract with our employer."

Following his speech, delegates came to the microphone to announce financial support from their local or district. Many used the opportunity to add to the financial support they already provide. According to the Steelworkers, approximately \$100,000 in financial support was raised at the conference. Several delegations took financial support application forms provided by the conference for use in their regions in organizing a vote in favour of additional financial support.

The Workers' Union at the Coca-Cola's Bottling Plant (STECOA) in Guatemala sent a cheque of \$1,000 to support the ABI workers. STECOA recalled that international support for their struggle was critical when they faced the most violent repression in the 1980s and after from the company, the oligarchy and its police, army and paramilitary forces. The number of union locals providing financial support to ABI workers now stands at more than 400 in Quebec, Canada, the United States, Australia and now Guatemala.



Quebec Premier Legault Blames ABI Workers for Causing Government Cutbacks to Social Programs

The Quebec Legault government is continuing attacks on ABI workers and their union which favour the Alcoa global cartel. Premier Legault was asked in the National Assembly about previous statements blaming the union for the lockout and giving unqualified support for Alcoa's attacks on

workers and the use of a phoney "force majeure" to skip out on paying for its allotted electricity from Hydro-Québec. Legault responding with an astounding statement according to which ABI workers in Bécancour are partly to blame for his government's cutbacks of social programs and public services! According to Legault, the determined resistance of the ABI workers to Alcoa's attacks on their rights and their refusal to submit to the dictate of the cartel for concessions is depriving the state of tax revenue that is needed to fund social programs and alleviate poverty! Turning truth on its head he does not hold the company to account for refusing to negotiate in good faith. He blames the workers' resistance to the attack on their rights.

If ABI workers lose their well-paid jobs by being unreasonable in this dispute, they have only themselves to blame, Legault is quoted as saying. Such slanderous statements only serve to convince the ABI workers and their allies that their struggle is also directed against those governments that are using the public treasury and police powers to serve global monopolies such as Alcoa and Rio Tinto in opposition to the rights, security and well-being of their own working people and society.

Legault's words attacking the integrity and rights of Quebec workers, and his slavish devotion to a foreign global oligopoly, which wants the unbridled right to exploit the human and natural resources of the nation and abscond with even more value than it takes today, have earned him the scorn of working people. He has proved himself unfit to govern and useless as a representative of the interests of the Quebec people.



Alcoa in Australia and Its Global Campaign Against the Working Class

Australia is one of the largest bauxite producing countries in the world. Bauxite is the main ore used in the production of aluminum. Alcoa owns two bauxite mines, three alumina refineries and an aluminum smelter in Australia, as well as port facilities. Alcoa sought and obtained a judgment from the Australian industrial relations tribunal in 2018 that declared null and void the collective agreement covering 1,500 Alcoa workers. The spurious reasons presented and accepted by the state institution are that the collective agreement dealing with terms of employment does not give Alcoa the "flexibility" required to compete on global markets. This effectively denies Australian Alcoa workers and their union their right to a say regarding their wages and working conditions.

In Quebec, tremendous hydro-electric capacity exists because of the natural water resource and its transformation into electricity through the ingenuity and hard work of the Quebec working people. Plentiful electricity is the essential circulating value to produce aluminum. Smelter workers are the essential human factor.

Alcoa uses the self-serving issue of flexibility and competition with other global oligopolies to demand that the ABI smelter operations in Quebec be restructured without interference or agreement with those who produce the aluminum and their local union or their government representatives.

The global oligopoly has a contract with Hydro-Québec for preferential industrial rates for a block of energy set aside for it. During the lockout Alcoa is refusing to pay for this on the grounds of "force majeure," i.e. a situation beyond its control. The Quebec government is going along with this fraud which means that it is the people of Quebec, through the loss of income to Hydro-Québec, who are financing the lockout.

Raising flexibility and competition is meant to give some cover to Alcoa's self-serving campaign to lower the working and living conditions of the smelter workers and operate the plant without the union and the workers having a say or any right to decide those issues that concern their well-being and security. This has the singular purpose of increasing the value the owners of Alcoa can expropriate from the work of ABI workers and the transferred-value it consumes from Hydro-Québec and other local sources. In this way, Alcoa and other owners of the smelter will increase the added-value they can expropriate and take out of Quebec for use elsewhere in the world.



The Fight for Proper Working Conditions in Health Care

Quebec Nurses Hold Successful "No Mandatory Overtime" Day of Action



Health care workers at Maisonneuve-Rosemont hospital in Montreal are joined by community supporters, with banner reading "Nurses Angry -- Citizens In Solidarity!" April 8, 2019.

"There is no turning back!"

Some 76,000 nurses, licensed practical nurses, respiratory therapists and clinical perfusionists, members of the Quebec Interprofessional Health Federation (FIQ) held a successful "No Mandatory Overtime" day of action on April 8, as its members performed no mandatory overtime during the day of action. This proves the health care system can operate without mandatory overtime, noted FIQ President Nancy Bédard. Moreover, use of mandatory overtime as a regular practice can be ended if the government and management at health care facilities take adequate measures on the basis of proposals put forward by the nurses themselves.

Early in the morning, the banner "Mandatory Overtime Has Gone On Long Enough" was hoisted in front of a large number of health facilities in several of Quebec's regions, with nurses standing by their union flag before entering work. The banner was also unfurled on many bridges overlooking traffic. Citizen actions in support of the day's event were organized in Montreal, Quebec City and Drummondville in front of health facilities where participants held banners reading "Nurses Angry -- Citizens In Solidarity! The Canadian Union of Public Employees, which has 25,000 members who work in the Quebec health and social services network and are also experiencing the turmoil of mandatory overtime, expressed its support for the nurses' day of action.



Banner outside hospital in Bas St. Laurent, April 8, 2019.

Over the years, the practice of mandatory overtime has been turned into a system of management by governments and administrations. At press briefings throughout the day the nurses reiterated their demands, which if met, could put an end to the practice. A first demand is to abolish mandatory overtime except in the case of an unforeseen emergency. This action must become a priority for the government and health facility administrations, which is not the case at present.



Banner hangs on overpass in Abitibi-Temiscamingue.

Through the anti-social offensive that successive governments have imposed in health care for the benefit of private interests, the human factor represented by hundreds of thousands of health care workers has been denied and seen as a cost and a burden on the health care system. Thousands of jobs have been permanently abolished. The use of mandatory overtime has become a chronic form of management, regardless of the devastating effects on staff and patients. The priority must change, nurses say, so that the working conditions change, which also change their living conditions. For this to take place, a massive and targeted reinvestment in the health system is needed, a specific portion of which must be devoted to the working conditions of health care professionals.

Nurses are calling for an upgrade of positions. Overtime and under work exist side by side. It is unacceptable, they say, that a shortage of manpower is being invoked to justify mandatory overtime when so many nurses are currently working only about two days a week.

Upgrading jobs to full-time or four-day a week positions is an immediate measure that would significantly reduce mandatory overtime. Nurses are calling for job upgrades on a stable basis, not by rotation where they would be constantly moved from one institution to another, possibly even over long distances. That would be unacceptable for nurses and patients, and would not attract young people to join the ranks of nurses. According to the FIQ, the Lanaudière region recently upgraded all of its nursing positions to four days a week to avoid the use of mandatory overtime

during the week and the results are already positive.

Nurses are also demanding safe nurse-to-patient ratios, which would stabilize the situation and reduce reliance on mandatory overtime.

On the April 8 day of action, nurses broke the code of silence oppressing them by waging this courageous action and have strongly impressed public opinion. They have forcefully reiterated and put into practice what is supposed to be official policy that mandatory overtime is an exceptional emergency measure, which ultimately must be left up to the nurse, the only person who can judge

whether he or she is able to dispense that service or not. Indeed, the nurses' Code of Ethics includes the obligation to take reasonable action to ensure the continuity of care and treatment as well as the duty to refrain from practicing their profession when in a state that is liable to impair the quality of care and services.

All of this was brought to the public's attention through the day of action. Nurses are determined that there is no turning back from their just demands.



Maisonnette-Rosemont hospital, Montreal



Montreal, West Island



Montreal Cardiology Institute



Drummondville



Montérégie East



Mauricie and Central Quebec Region



Sherbrooke



Bas St. Laurent

(Photos: FIQ)



The Neo-Liberal Logic of Permanent Exceptionalism to Criminalize the Struggles of Quebec Public Sector Workers

- Pierre Soublière -



Health care workers in the Quebec City Region participate in April 8, 2019 day of action.

No sooner had the Quebec nurses' union announced that on April 8, nurses would collectively refuse to accept mandatory overtime, they were summoned to appear before the Labour Tribunal. The tribunal was formed in January 2016 as the result of a merger between the Commission des lésions professionnelles and the Commission des relations de travail. The tribunal presents itself as fostering, "amicable settlement of disputes through its conciliation service."

The tribunal sits in four divisions: labour relations, occupational health and safety, essential services, and the construction industry and occupational qualification. It has "remedial authority" under a clause in the *Labour Code*, which states that the tribunal may intervene "if it is of the opinion that a conflict could jeopardize or is clearly liable to jeopardize a service to which the public is entitled." This clause is at the heart of all the special legislation passed since the adoption of the *Labour Code* in 1964 and which became even more repressive in the 1980s with the onset of the neo-liberal offensive.

As in most cases involving collective actions by hospital workers and teachers, the state labour tribunals intervene in a totally one-sided manner against the workers. In contrast, the tribunals never seem to be compelled to intervene with the everyday deterioration of the health and education sectors and the working conditions of those involved due to government cutbacks and other anti-social actions.

The tribunals activate themselves whenever collective actions are undertaken or planned whereby workers seek to find solutions to the problems they and their sector face and to demand improvement in their working conditions and the quality of the health and educational services they provide.

With regards more specifically to nurses' working conditions and state intervention, the government jumped to pass Bill 160 following a two-day non-consecutive strike by nurses in 1986. The government said it was intervening in the name of providing essential services in a strike situation.

Bill 160 compelled the unions to ensure 90 per cent of the nursing staff was on the job. This number is over and above what hospitals provide in terms of staffing all year long. More nurses were compelled to provide services while on strike than during a normal work day!

In the case of refusing mandatory overtime, the Essential Services Board in 1998 forbade nurses to refuse to do overtime while their collective agreement was still in force. Problem is, when the time comes to renew the collective agreement, the legal and criminalizing constraints are so great as to render actual "good faith" negotiating impossible and any collective action ineffective.

The University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM) undertook a study in 2014 on the use and impact of special legislation in Quebec. The study, sponsored by all the major unions in Quebec, pointed out that public sector workers were hardest hit by the criminalization of workers' struggles.[1] In its conclusion, the report says with regards to labour relations a "logic of permanent exceptionalism" prevails. It states: "Special legislation, used as a sword of Damocles, is now seen as a normal mechanism of managing conflicts in society. There must be a public debate on their impact on the right to negotiate and the right to strike, which itself is not recognized in the Quebec or Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*."

Note

1. Research into special legislation in Quebec, by Martin Petitclerc and Martin Robert.



Interview

- *Éric Tremblay, President, Health Care Professionals Union of East Montreal (FIQ)* -

Workers' Forum: How was the No Mandatory Overtime action in your area?

Éric Tremblay: The day was very successful. There was no mandatory overtime worked in our area and we are 4,300 health care professionals, nurses, licensed practical nurses and respiratory therapists. It's a first. So far, mandatory overtime has been used 350 times in our area since January. Our day of action shows that when the employer is willing to make an effort, it's possible to avoid mandatory overtime. There must be good planning. When we are shortstaffed, it can be difficult to find people to fill in, so management uses mandatory overtime to keep the same people on shift, the easiest thing for them to do.

We hoisted our banner "Mandatory Overtime Has Gone On Long Enough" over Autoroute 25 to notify the public that we were holding a day without mandatory overtime. There was a citizens' demonstration in front of the Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital with the banner "Nurses Angry -- Citizens in Solidarity!"

WF: Can you briefly explain what problems are caused by mandatory overtime in your area?

ET: For years we've had budget cuts and management hired part-time workers. They are starting to hire for full-time jobs again, but a lot of workers don't want them because they're worried that if they work five days, they will end up doing five days with mandatory overtime. They fear being held hostage longer and more frequently.

Mandatory overtime causes a lot of problems for workers as well as patients. It affects alertness,

causes fatigue, burnout. We have a huge rate of absenteeism. If I'm not mistaken, we're close to a rate of 15 per cent for long-term disability absenteeism in the Montreal's east end. We're not talking about day-to-day life here, about calling in sick for the day. Burnout is largely the result of mandatory overtime.

When they cannot find someone for mandatory overtime, they increase the workload. If you're in the emergency room, for example, and you have to take care of eight patients instead of four, you cannot be as vigilant. The ratios are smaller in the emergency department, because the cases and care are complex, it requires greater vigilance. This is where the issue of safe care comes in. This means that at some point, the patient may not be receiving the proper treatment or may not receive it within the required time frame. Let's take the example of a Long-Term Health Care Facility (CHSLD) where there is instability, where people are tired, and the ratio is increased to the point that at times a nurse could have 75 patients. You are supposed to give people their medication at 8 am, but how can you do that if you have 75 patients to take care of? One patient may receive medication at 11 am and another at noon. The interval for the medication is not respected. Medication is not meant to be taken in this haphazard manner. So the population is also being held hostage with regard to their care.

WF: What are you proposing to remedy the situation?

ET: We have proposed a work-time reorganization. It's a project initiated by us, which would be applied to the eastern part of the island. It's an eight-day work schedule covering a two-week period, with full-time conditions, meaning a bank of sick days, a full-time pension, benefits, etc. We would work two four-day weeks with a weekday off. Anything over eight days of work in that two-week period would be paid overtime. Right now the project is being tested in the emergency department. The employer is open to it, but for the moment is not ready to pay overtime beginning on the ninth day. People working in emergency are keen on it. It's not full-time work. It's more than part-time, with employees being given full-time conditions.

WF: Do you want to say something in conclusion?



"Mandatory overtime is the problem, never the solution."

ET: We are asking all workers to support this cause because it is their cause. What we provide are services. This not a commercial enterprise. People have the right to good quality services. That's why we have ratio projects, to determine how many patients a nurse should have to be able to provide quality care. Where ratio projects are being tested, where the workload has been lightened, it has been demonstrated that there are fewer injuries; patients are left alone for less time, particularly in CHSLDs. The same goes for intensive care, if you have safe care, chances are you will recover more quickly; there is less chance of error, etc. There are investments to be made at the beginning to ensure savings further down the line.

Under current conditions, the employer has every interest in keeping the problems under wraps. There is a hidden understanding that your job is at risk if you reveal what the employer is doing. We defend the right of our members to say what is happening. To date, we have had 10 disciplinary warnings for refusing to do mandatory overtime. Yet our code of ethics says that if you are

exhausted and do not feel that you are able to work, that you may put people at risk, you have the right not to accept. We are contesting all the disciplinary warnings.

If we work without mandatory overtime, it's a win-win situation for all.



The Fight for Proper Working Conditions in the Trucking Industry

March 21 -- Fifth Anniversary of Vancouver Truckers' Strike



March 21 marked the fifth anniversary of the Vancouver truckers' strike in which 500 Unifor union truckers united with the 1,500 truckers of Punjabi origin who were members of the United Workers Association (ATU). Together, they defeated the Vancouver Port Authority, the Christy Clark government in British Columbia and the federal government of Stephen Harper and his infamous Minister of Transport Lisa Raitt. It was a great success for Canadian truckers. This struggle continues to inspire truckers today, in the context of a new offensive whereby migrant or foreign workers are hired with the aim of increasing the exploitation of all truckers and preventing standards being set for the industry according to the needs of the drivers. The way forward for this contingent of the working class continues to be the one they took five years ago -- to unite in action to defend the rights of all truckers in Canada, regardless of their national origin.



Defending the Rights of Injured Workers
Coming Events



Niagara Region
Injured Workers Outreach Forum
April 10 – 6:00-8:30 pm
Sir Isaac Brock Blvd, Thorold
Hosted by Niagara Injured Workers Group
[Facebook](#)

Guelph
Injured Workers Outreach Event
April 11 – 4:00-6:00 pm
611 Silvercreek Parkway North
Hosted by Injured Workers of Wellington and Dufferin Counties
[Facebook](#)

Pan-Ontario
Workers' Comp Is a Right!
Tuesday, May 14
As part of the ongoing Workers' Comp Is a Right Campaign a pan-Ontario Day of action is being organized for May 14 with actions planned in Windsor, St Catharines, Peel, Thunder Bay, Guelph, Manitoulin, and Toronto and more cities expected to join.
For information as it becomes available [click here](#).

36th Annual Ontario Injured Workers' Day

Toronto
Women of Inspiration Vigil
Friday, May 31 -- 4:00 pm to Saturday, June 1 -- 9:00 am
Queen's Park
For information as it becomes available [click here](#).

Ontario-wide
Ontario Injured Workers' Day
Saturday, June 1
Queen's Park
For information as it becomes available [click here](#).



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