

May 2, 2019

**Quebec Minister of Labour Intervenes on  
Behalf of Global Monopoly**

## **Alcoa and Government Reject Negotiations with Locked-Out ABI Workers**



ABI workers take their demands to National Assembly in Quebec City, Energy March,  
March 27, 2019. (*Metallos*)

- **Unacceptable Move by Government to Impose Concessions Demanded by Alcoa on ABI Workers**
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## **Alcoa and Government Reject Negotiations with Locked-Out ABI Workers**

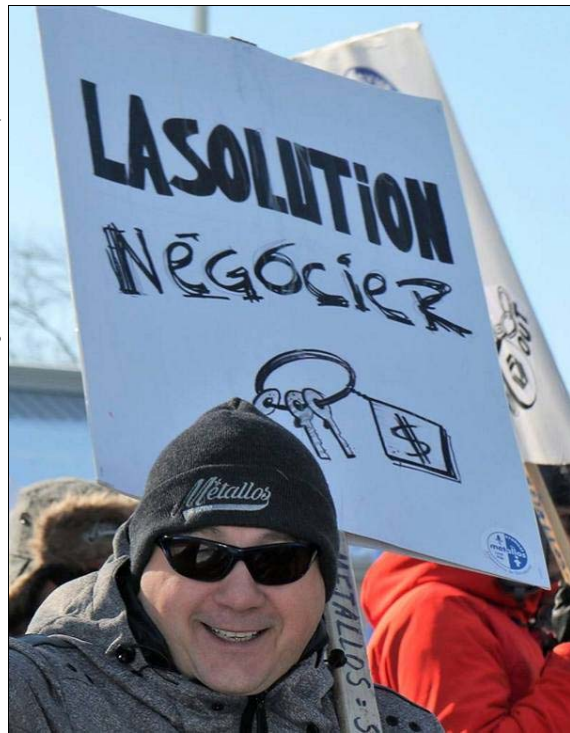
The Quebec Minister of Labour has presented an Alcoa/government settlement proposal and demand for union members' acceptance as a way to end the stalemate in the current unjust lockout of ABI smelter workers. This demand for acceptance of what has been unacceptable for 16 months once again reveals the government's refusal to intervene to bring an end to the lockout in a way workers can accept with dignity.

Right from the beginning of the lockout, workers have asked and are still asking the government to put pressure on the owners to negotiate with the workers to arrive at a collective agreement that they deem acceptable or at least pressure the owners to accept binding arbitration. The union has even proposed arbitration as a last resort to break the deadlock.

Why does the Legault government, and its Minister, find unthinkable and unpalatable the idea that ABI workers should have the right to negotiate their working conditions or at least submit their demands and concerns to an arbitrator? From the beginning, none of the offers of the Alcoa cartel have been a result of negotiations with USW Local 9700. The proposals to settle and end the lockout, including the current joint one from Alcoa and the government have been the negation of negotiations. Nothing in their proposals comes from workers speaking out about their conditions, their concerns and their just claim to the immense wealth they produce. How then can the government consider the already rejected proposal as a solution to the impasse? The proposal is a negation of the right of workers and their elected representatives to negotiate a collective agreement; the unilateral government/Alcoa proposal is a backroom deal to silence the voice of the workers, a voice that resounded loudly at their March 11 meeting and vote.

Minister Boulet's demand for a vote on something workers and their representatives had no role in preparing means he does not respect the voice of the workers. He does not respect their right to have their union representatives negotiate an agreement, which the workers could then discuss and decide with their vote whether to support it or not.

*(Photo: Metallos)*



# Unacceptable Move by Government to Impose Concessions Demanded by Alcoa on ABI Workers

Quebec Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity Jean Boulet submitted a settlement proposal and back-to-work protocol on April 17 to the management of Aluminerie de Bécancour Inc. (ABI) and USW Local 9700 representing ABI workers. Boulet presented his proposal knowing full well that ABI workers had massively rejected an almost identical one only weeks before. One could surmise from this that the Quebec government is engaged in an information war against the smelter workers on behalf of Alcoa, and seeks to excuse its unwillingness to force the monopoly to pay Hydro-Québec for its contracted electricity during the long lockout and come to a negotiated settlement with workers agreeable to them.

With this deceptive manoeuvre the government appears in partnership with Alcoa and its unjust 16-month lockout to force concessions on workers that would destroy their union and seriously undermine the well-being of their community. The deceit surrounding the government settlement proposal was quickly confirmed a few days later with ABI management's acceptance of it as a "framework" to reach a final agreement to end the lockout and restart the plant.

USW Local 9700 denounced the settlement proposal as a "copy-and-paste of the last employer's offer rejected by our members" on March 11. Similar to Alcoa's offer, Local 9700 found the government's proposal an unacceptable attack on the main issues of organization of work, working hours, the pension plan, respect for seniority, the use of subcontracting and the abolition of jobs. The union said it would inform its members of the content of the proposal but would not hold a general meeting to vote on something already rejected by an 82 per cent vote at a meeting with a turnout of 90 per cent of members.



In words that best describe the content of the government's unhelpful proposal, President of USW Local 9700 Clément Masse spoke to *Workers' Forum* following the March 11 membership meeting and vote to reject Alcoa's similar offer and back-to-work protocol:

"The workers said that this is not a negotiated agreement and accepting such an agreement is like saying you do not have a union anymore, that the employer can do whatever it wants. The offer that the employer presented shows a lack of respect for us and it is the same as regards the back-to-work protocol. We have built our union and we have built our contracts over the years, and we do not agree that we should lose everything because the employer wants to smash the union. That is what came out of the interventions at the mic; that we are still able to stand up and will not accept just anything even after 14 months. It is not true that the employer can impose its way of doing things on us. They will have to sit down and negotiate and show respect for the workers. The workers have also targeted the energy deal with Alcoa that is hurting us and doing nothing but prolonging the conflict."

Masse reiterated this sentiment in a statement issued by ABI workers on the evening of March 11:



"The offer represented a series of take-backs by the company. ABI has refused to negotiate, it has refused to accept third-party arbitration. It just wanted to impose its will, counting on fatigue from its 14-month lockout. The answer from our members is clear: it didn't work. The members don't want to go back on their knees. Alcoa disrespects our *Labour Code* by negotiating in bad faith, it disrespects Quebeckers by making them pay for its lockout, it disrespects workers by closing the door on negotiation as well as arbitration. The government of Quebec must intervene. The imbalance of power is unacceptable and the behaviour of this multinational is unacceptable."



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## Alcoa and Quebec Government Work in Tandem to Attack Workers' Rights



**In mass membership meeting March 11, 2019 the workers massively reject Alcoa's offer and back-to-work protocol, one almost identical to that which the Quebec government is pushing.**  
(*Metallos*)

Instead of standing with Quebec working people in solidarity against an unjust attack by a powerful global oligopoly, Quebec Minister of Labour Jean Boulet is engaged in a sideshow to attack locked-out ABI smelter workers of USW Local 9700 in Bécancour. Boulet is scurrying all over the place declaring his "disappointment" that the union will not present the Alcoa/government proposal for capitulation to a general membership meeting and hold a vote on it.

Boulet likewise refuses to acknowledge that the workers massively voted against a similar proposal on March 11. Boulet is engaging in a campaign to portray the union in a negative light, even declaring it undemocratic for not taking the Alcoa/government proposal back to the membership for a vote. In doing so, Boulet seeks to gloss over his government's refusal to make Alcoa live up to its contract with Quebec Hydro to pay for its bloc of energy during the lockout or pressure the global company into negotiating a settlement or accepting arbitration.

Boulet wants workers to vote again on something they already rejected. In doing so he dismisses the strong stand of union members in defending their rights in their vote and words of March 11, when members declared openly and in great numbers that Alcoa, despite its pumped up global power and dictatorial behaviour, would have to respect their rights and negotiate a collective agreement agreeable to workers or submit the conflict to arbitration.



# False Concessions and Real Concessions



Quebec Minister of Labour Jean Boulet claims that with his proposal to settle the lockout at ABI, he demands concessions from both sides. Similar to what Alcoa has been saying all along, Boulet contends concessions from both sides without the give-and-take of discussions and negotiations make the proposal fair, balanced and worthy of support.

Working people must remember that none of the company or government concessions much less the various proposals ever arose from negotiations with union representatives of the ABI workers. In a negotiated collective agreement such give-and-take would form part of the negotiations. Simply to inform the world of a final settlement and demand workers vote on it because both sides have supposedly made concessions means that the government and company have no intention of any give and take let alone serious negotiations respecting the rights of workers and their representatives to find a solution to their differences.

Radio-Canada says it received a copy and the Minister himself describes some of its aspects. Making the proposal public and subject to speculation is a form of information war to force through something that is unacceptable and a negation of negotiations and the rights of workers.

Outside any forum with workers for serious negotiations, Boulet talks publicly of two concessions he asks of the owners. First, the minister wants ABI management to drop its \$19 million damage grievance against USW Local 9700 and its officers. The grievance filed long ago accuses the union and members of alleged sabotage of operations in the plant during the months leading to the lockout in January 2018.

To consider the withdrawal of this false grievance concocted by management as a concession during negotiations for a collective agreement is completely fraudulent. The union has long pointed out that the company made no reference to any alleged acts of sabotage at the time they are said to have occurred. Management complaints over the safety and security of plant operations and alleged threats of sabotage during contract negotiations have become commonplace propaganda and lame excuses to justify lockouts. For the grievance for damages to be removed is not a concession but rather a change in tactics. A withdrawal in no way affects Alcoa's concessionary demands on working conditions and workers' security and union rights. The withdrawal of this grievance has not even been raised as a demand by the union in all its attempts to have talks with the company. Besides, common practice upon the completion of negotiations is that both parties renounce their lawsuits as part of the negotiated settlement. Minister Boulet admitted as much, saying to the press: "When I wrote the back-to-work protocol, that was one of the concessions I asked the company to do and I told them: when we make a back-to-work protocol we start afresh, do away with all the legal recourse that was done before or during the conflict, directly or indirectly related to the conflict."

The second company concession as defined by the Minister is a modification of the unilateral back-to-work protocol that the cartel sought to impose, which workers rejected with contempt at their

March 11 mass meeting and vote. According to the Minister, the reinstatement of workers will now be done in six months instead of 10.

The union has already denounced 10 or six months before reinstatement as unprecedented and wholly unacceptable. It only took two months to reinstate all ABI workers after their 2004 strike. In addition, the time frame in the proposed back to work protocol whether six or 10 months remains conditional on what the owners themselves consider as safe conditions. Also, according to Clément Masse, President of USW Local 9700, the settlement proposal speaks of a "goal" of reintegration and faster restarting of activities, and not an "obligation." For the Minister to suggest a change from 10 to six months is a concession on the part of the company, while the overall unilateral imposition of a most backward back-to-work protocol has already been universally denounced, is to engage in hypocrisy and propaganda to impose a government endorsed company dictate that undermines the rights of workers and their dignity.

The real concessions demanded in the here and now from even before the lockout are those the global oligarchs want from the workers affecting all aspects of their life at work and in retirement. In fact, the entire episode of non-negotiations has been a series of unilateral dictates for concessions and final offers from ABI management. During these non-negotiations, ABI workers have not been able to present their demands to defend their working conditions as they exist today let alone improve them. Their effort from the beginning was to preserve what they have. Masse said the union would even have agreed to simply renew the collective agreement as it stands.

From the beginning of their effort for a new collective agreement, the workers asked for the elimination of certain company concessionary demands or at least their reduction in scope. Such is the case with regard to the abolition of unionized positions for example. The government suggests union opposition to concessions is not that at all but new demands put forward by the union that would undermine Alcoa's global competitiveness and risk closure of the plant.

The union says a professor of labour relations at the University of Quebec at Trois-Rivières, who has read the government settlement proposal, says the Minister is concerned with Alcoa's global competitiveness and even added new wording to the settlement proposal that would further facilitate the outsourcing of jobs so as to eliminate regular union jobs and undermine working conditions at the plant.

The Quebec government is pursuing an unacceptable campaign against aluminum workers on behalf of a global power. It refuses to uphold its duty as government to defend the well-being and security of its own people. This disastrous path further accentuates disequilibrium between oligopolies such as Alcoa and their workers, communities and the society in which these global behemoths operate. In a cowardly gesture, the government is offering Quebec and its people on a silver platter to these global supranational private interests instead of defending the workers and the people by restricting the power of these oligopolies and working to establish equilibrium that serves the people in an atmosphere approved and controlled by them.

*(Photo: Metallos)*



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## **Strike at Glencore's Brunswick Smelter in Belledune, New Brunswick Workers Stand Up for Their Rights and Dignity**

In the early evening of April 24, the 281 production and maintenance workers at the Glencore Brunswick smelter in Belledune, New Brunswick went on strike. The workers launched their strike

to defend themselves against the concessionary demands of the Glencore mining and metallurgical monopoly. The smelter workers are members of United Steelworkers' Local 7085.



The workers met on April 4 and 5 to discuss the situation and decide on a course of action with participation at close to 100 per cent. Ninety-six per cent voted to withdraw their capacity to work beginning April 24 at 6 pm. When workers for the dayshift arrived the morning before the evening strike, company officials forcibly prevented them from entering the plant under the hoax that the security and safety of operations was threatened.

Two days later, the Court of Queen's Bench of New Brunswick on behalf of the Glencore oligarchs issued a court order limiting the number of picketers to six at the entrances or exits of the smelter and at any other geographical location in New Brunswick where Glencore conducts business. The court also ordered the workers not to obstruct in any way any movement of employees, customers, suppliers and others to and from the plant or to "harass" them including a prohibition of taking photographs. The court further ordered workers not to in any way obstruct the movement of rail cars to and from the plant, which employs in total 450 people.

President of Local 7085 Bart Dempsey said the main dispute with the company is on the issue of health and safety. Glencore is demanding that the paid full-time position of the union co-chair of the joint health and safety committee be transformed into a part-time position. The full-time position was created after a strike in 1991, when health and safety was addressed.

President Dempsey told *Workers' Forum*, "They are trying to get rid of our full-time safety rep. They are trying to get rid of his office. That is a big key issue to the workers. There are a lot of health and safety issues in a smelter like ours. We are working with molten metal, high traffic equipment areas, overhead cranes, you name it. Plus all the chemicals you have to deal with. We've got a dangerous workplace."

Workers on the picket lines told the media that under Glencore's management the smelter has become an even more hazardous workplace. In this situation, the workers say that having a full-time union representative on site whom they can consult to determine whether a job is safe to perform or not is important.

In a further attack on the right of workers to have a prominent union presence at the workplace, Glencore wants to stop paying for a full-time president of the local. In downgrading the union presence, the company wants to pay only for a certain amount of hours for the President to engage in union business outside of his regular hours.

According to the union, Glencore also has concessionary demands concerning the pension plans and



benefits. The biggest hit for workers in terms of the pension plans would be the elimination of the voluntary early retirement plan, which allows members of the defined benefits (DB) plan to retire before turning 65 with a certain number of years worked and still receive their full pension. If the arrangement is eliminated, DB plan members who choose to retire early would be subject to a provincial regulation that reduces their pension amount by six per cent per year ahead of when they are scheduled to retire. To receive their full pension, they would have to work until they are 65, no matter how many years they have spent at the metal smelter, which everyone knows takes an enormous toll on a worker's health.

The elimination of the current early retirement process would be yet another hit for workers after the company forced a major change to their pension plan during the previous negotiations. For the current four-year contract, which took effect in 2015, the company shut down the DB plan to employees with less than 12 years seniority at the smelter and switched them over to an inferior defined contribution arrangement.

Glencore also wants to reduce employees' health, dental and drug coverage.

In response, the workers firmly demand the dignity and respect they deserve for the hard work they do in the lead/silver/copper smelter. Concessions on health and safety and pensions are unacceptable. Signs on the picket line include: "Hands Off Our Union Reps!"; "Hands Off Our Pensions!" and "Bullying Has to Stop!"

President Dempsey informed *Workers' Forum* that since the signing of the last contract in 2014, Glencore has terminated 32 workers for various reasons, many of them under the inhumane legal doctrine of "frustration of employment contract," which translates into termination due to injury or illness of workers who are on long-term disability. That is a trademark of Glencore's labour relations and is what workers are aiming to stop with their strike, Dempsey said.

(Photo: USW District 6)



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### **The Fight for Working Conditions in Health Care Acceptable to Those Who Do the Work**

## **Nurses Step Up Their Fight Against Mandatory Overtime and Other Pressing Issues**

Nurses across Canada are tackling the crisis in working conditions in the health care sector. Those working conditions have a deep impact on the health and safety of health care workers and on the patients in their care. Nurses are demanding not words but deeds in concrete measures from the government and administrations of the health care institutions to correct the situation. At this time, a major focus of their actions is the opposition to mandatory overtime, which governments and administrations have forced upon nurses as a constant system of crisis management.

### **Quebec Interprofessional Health Federation (FIQ)**

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. Members performed no mandatory overtime during the day of action. According to the FIQ, the successful action without major incident proved that the health care system can operate without mandatory overtime.





**Quebec health care workers in Mauricie region participate in "No Mandatory Overtime" day of action April 8, 2019. (FIQ)**

Shortly after they held their day of action, the FIQ leadership held a meeting with the Quebec Minister of Health and Social Services to push forward the nurses' demands for the upgrading of jobs. This would mean for example upgrading jobs from two-day a week to a certain stability with full time or four-day weeks. This would also be accomplished without rotation of nurses where they are constantly moved from one institution to another, possibly even over long distances.

A concrete agreement was reached whereby the Minister pledged that the CEOs of health care establishments will soon call the local unions together to begin the work of upgrading jobs so that definite action plans can be worked out before summer. An agreement was also reached to do a summation of the pilot projects regarding nurse/patient ratios that were carried out in a number of health departments of various institutions across Quebec. The joint summation will determine the parameters to be used for ratios to be deployed in institutions where the need is particularly critical.

### **New Brunswick Nurses Union (NBNU) Addresses Mandatory Overtime**

NBNU is tackling the problem of the inability of nurses to leave at the end of their scheduled shift. They are coerced into working shifts as long as 24 hours under the pretext of "patient abandonment." The result leads to an unsafe working environment and unsafe patient care, which is unacceptable according to the nurses' union.

NBNU is highlighting the fact that registered nurses are governed by the *Nurses Act* and by the Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses and the Nurses Association of New Brunswick (NANB), as their licensing body. As registered professionals, nurses must be allowed to exercise their judgement on their own fitness to practice. The Code says:

"Nurses maintain their fitness to practice. If they are aware that they do not have the necessary physical, mental or emotional capacity to practise safely and competently, they withdraw from the provision of care after consulting with their employer. [...]"

Given the seriousness of the issue, NBNU has collaborated with NANB to produce a safety package, which includes Guidelines for working beyond scheduled shifts and a Letter addressing their concerns, which reads:

"This letter confirms that on the following date: \_\_\_\_\_, on the following unit/facility: \_\_\_\_\_ you, \_\_\_\_\_, my supervisor, have requested that I, \_\_\_\_\_, remain on duty beyond my scheduled shift. I have also notified you that, in my professional opinion, I do not feel safe to practice beyond my scheduled shift due to personal health reasons (including fatigue), and I have requested that you

make every reasonable effort to find alternative relief.

"Please be advised that the Collective Agreement governing my employment does not provide for mandatory overtime. Please be further advised that practice guidelines of the Nurses Association of New Brunswick provide that the following situations are not considered abandonment: refusing to work extra hours or shifts beyond the posted work schedule when the nurse has given proper notice, and withdrawing from care due to fitness to practice concerns (personal health issues, including fatigue) with appropriate notice.

"Please confirm your decision in writing:

"Authorization to Leave

"I acknowledge that I have read and understood the above, and that you have advised me that you do not feel safe to practice during the extra hours that I have asked you to work. I will find an alternative relief and allow you to leave work at \_\_\_\_\_.

"Signature of Supervisor

"OR

"Requirement to Work

"I acknowledge that I have read and understood the above, and that you have advised me that, in your professional opinion, you do not feel safe to practice during these extra hours. Notwithstanding your professional opinion, I am nonetheless requiring you to work from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

"Signature of Supervisor"

The letter is meant to counter the threats and pressure exercised on nurses resulting in them not being able to leave at the end of their shift.

### **Registered Nurses' Union Newfoundland & Labrador (RNUNL)**

RNUNL is waging a campaign to oppose insufficient nurse staffing levels. The union points out that staffing problems are leading nurses to be forced to work on occasion 24-hour shifts or five shifts in a week that can extend to 16 to 20 hours of work or sometimes up to seven 12-hour shifts in a row. This also leads to patients having to be flown out of the province to receive the care they need. RNUNL is demanding the withdrawal of the implied rule that the health care system is to function on the basis of the exhaustion and lack of safety of nurses, which puts them at risk as well as endangering patients. The union demands the immediate hiring of more nurses so that the sector reaches adequate staffing levels.



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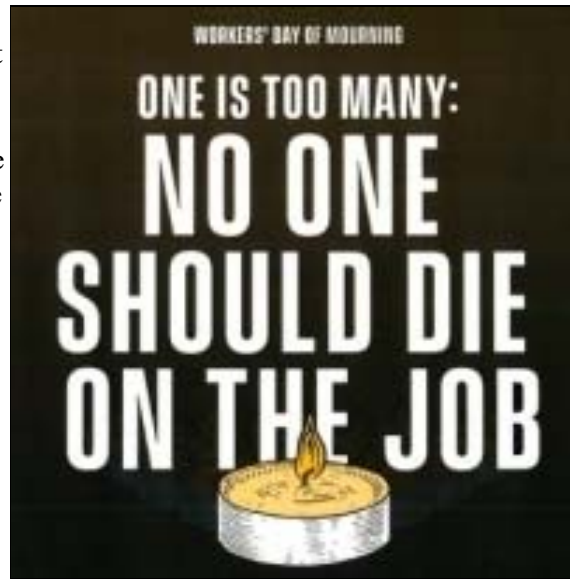
**April 28 Day of Mourning**

## **Mourn for the Dead, Fight for the Living**

As is done every year, this year also the International Day of Mourning for workers killed and injured on job sites was observed across the country. As on every occasion, not only lives lost in the past were remembered and given the significance they deserve, but special attention was paid to commemorating the lives lost in the past year. The total figures for 2018 are not yet available, however for 2017, the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada reported 951 work-

related deaths, up 46 from 2016. These deaths do not include workers who are not covered by the provincial workers' compensation systems, e.g., the self-employed, domestic helpers, banking employees and farmers.

The injuries and deaths of workers on the job include significant numbers caused by the negligent policies of the federal and provincial governments in eliminating regulations and reporting of workplace injuries and deaths. This is a practice linked to the neo-liberal anti-social offensive. In the name of eliminating red tape, making Canada open for business and letting nothing stand in the way of making private profit, a serious deterioration of health and safety for workers ensues. Such is the case of the three railway workers who died in February, in the prime of their lives, because of the aim of the railways to increase their profit margins without regard for the human factor/social consciousness.



Other very serious concerns this year are those of the truckers whose long hours of work to make ends meet and deteriorating working conditions have created problems that need immediate attention. Along with this we see the battles being waged by health workers, teachers and education workers who suffer tremendous stress-related health issues as well as post-traumatic stress because working conditions are untenable. The treatment by governments of injured workers is also traumatic. Also of note is the stress related to contracting out, privatization and restructuring in the public sector and throughout the economy. Irregular work has now become a dangerous growing phenomenon affecting 31 per cent of all workers who often find themselves racing from job to job without stability or security of employment and any organized defence of their rights to safe and healthy working conditions. There is the Phoenix Pay System which has not worked properly since it came into being in 2016, causing tremendous stress to workers who cannot count on their remuneration reaching them in time to pay their bills.

Thus the issue of health and safety has gone way beyond the workplace where in the past it could be dealt with by unions and labour law, at least in places with unions and subject to labour law. It has become a political issue which requires putting decision-making in the hands of those who the decisions affect as a matter of life itself, not as a matter of profit-making. In this regard, the workers' movement is grappling with how workers can hold companies to account when labour law no longer upholds a regime based on notions of fairness between the contending parties -- capital on one side and labour on the other. Meanwhile, governments overtly intervene in the economy to criminalize opposition to unacceptable dictate, claiming it harms the national interest.

However, most importantly, decision-making on the direction of the economy and who it serves must reside in the working people not the rich. It is unconscionable that the working people have no way to decide policy in their own name. At this time, a main feature of the situation is that workers have no reason to trust any of the political parties which belong to a cartel within which they compete to form party governments. The fact is that working people are subject to an electoral system where they are supposed to choose who they will entrust to act in their name. This alleged freedom of choice is what is called a democracy, where one gives people called representatives a proxy to act in their name. It is a fraud with very serious consequences including on the fronts of peoples' health and safety at places of work.



The slogan "Mourn for the Dead, Fight for the Living" appropriately guides the working people on the occasion of the Day of Mourning, to identify and take up the struggles that will permit them to exercise control over their lives.



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## Under-Reporting of Job-Related Injuries and Deaths

- Nick Lin -

### Mobilizing for Ontario Injured Workers' Day June 1



### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The official annual figures for job-related deaths in Canada typically fall between 900 to 1,000, a number compiled from data from workers' compensation agencies. The actual numbers are no doubt higher as the numbers from the workers' compensation agencies leave many workers out of the picture. A recent study points out these deficiencies and underscores more than ever the need for working people to empower themselves, so that their right to safe and healthy working conditions can be realized in a meaningful way.

Their authors of the study state that their aim is to broaden the discussion about issues facing workers that contribute to illnesses and death. The study, titled "Work-related deaths in Canada," published in November 2018 in *Labour, the Journal of Canadian Labour Studies*, states in its abstract:

"This paper critically examines official statistics on workplace fatalities in Canada. Each year the Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada reports on the number of workers who die from a work-related injury or illness/disease. The problem, however, is that these data report the number of deaths that were accepted for compensation; it is not a system for tracking all work-related deaths. Drawing from a range of data sources and employing a broad definition of what constitutes death at work we attempt to generate a more accurate estimate of the number of work-related fatalities in Canada. In so doing our goal is not to produce a definitive number of annual deaths at work -- an impossibility given the paucity of data sources -- but instead to challenge dominant ways of conceptualizing what constitutes a work-related fatality and thus contribute to ongoing efforts to raise academic, political, and public awareness about this important issue. In this sense our goal is to question whether official statistics regarding workplace fatalities are complete

when set against a broader understanding of what constitutes death at work." [1]

The study points out that as a result of this limited source of information, thousands of deaths are missing from occupational health and safety statistics, such as for workers not covered by a public workers' compensation system, or deaths due to stress-induced suicides, fatalities while commuting and occupational diseases. Depending on the province, only 70 to 98 per cent of the workforce may be covered by a public workers' compensation system, which works out to more than two million workers in Canada whose injuries or deaths at work would not be included in official statistics. This would include workers who are self-employed, domestic helpers, banking employees and farmers, as well as the most vulnerable sectors of the working class whose working conditions are amongst the most dangerous -- undocumented and migrant workers.

"This situation is akin to crime statistics only ever including solved homicides, therein leaving the impression that attempted murders, unsolved murders or suspicious deaths are not a concern," write the study's authors. Steven Bittle, an associate criminology professor at the University of Ottawa who lead the research, explained to the CBC, "Our notion of what constitutes a workplace fatality is too narrow and it is a mistake to count work-related fatalities through our compensation regimes." Bittle and the other authors estimate that a more accurate figure is between 10,000 to 13,000 deaths annually.

The study's authors propose that deaths while commuting to and from work be included in workplace-fatality statistics, a figure they estimate at about 460 per year. "We live in a culture of presenteeism, where people are expected to be at work -- at least culturally expected to be at work, if not through pressures in their workforce -- regardless of whether they're ill or whether the weather conditions are such that they shouldn't be driving at that particular time," Bittle told the CBC.

Another category of fatalities the authors suggest could be included in these figures are non-workers who die collaterally, but whose deaths can be directly attributed to workplace issues, such as a spouse who dies from mesothelioma after exposure to asbestos from washing their partner's work clothes, or bystanders killed in a crane or scaffolding collapse while passing by a construction site.

The study also looks at situations of extreme stress arising from working conditions unlikely to be covered by the current arrangements. The example is given of a Saskatchewan man employed by a small rural municipality who in 2017 took his own life after struggling with mental-health issues worsened by his work. In this case, the province's compensation board partly attributed his death to his employer. However, the study suggests the number of suicide-related claims is drastically underestimated. Bittle estimates that between 10 and 17 per cent of annual suicides in Canada could be classified as work-related, which works out to 400 to 800 fatalities each year.

The study concludes by saying that the single biggest category for underestimation are work-related diseases. At present, while approximately 500 to 600 deaths attributed to occupational disease are reported through the compensation systems nationwide, Bittle estimates that the actual number is more than 8,000 deaths. Such situations are well-known to injured workers, their families and their organizations, who for decades have fought tooth-and-nail for work-related cancers and other diseases to be recognized under the workers' compensation systems.

For some occupations, workers' defence organizations have been successful in turning this situation around. CBC reports that in January, Prince Edward Island's *Workers Compensation Act* came into force, giving firefighters presumptive coverage for certain types of cancers and illnesses. PEI was the last province to make such provisions.

Another example familiar to readers of *Workers' Forum* is the fight of the General Electric workers in Peterborough, Ontario, for recognition of the compensation claims of workers exposed to toxic chemicals over the years and for compensation for themselves and their survivors.[2] Another

example is the McIntyre Power Project in Northern Ontario, that seeks justice for miners in Ontario's gold and uranium mines who in the mid-20th century were forced to inhale aluminum powder each shift purportedly to prevent silicosis, with many later suffering from serious neurological disorders, including Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases.[3]

This study underscores the justness of the the Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Groups' "Workers' Comp Is a Right" campaign to fight for a compensation system that is truly universal, so that no one's injuries or deaths can be swept under the rug, and the causes for these casualties can be identified and eliminated and compensation for the victims provided. It confirms the justness of working people's fight for the dignity of labour, beginning with putting an end to working conditions that endanger the lives and health of workers.

## Notes

1. ["Work-Related Deaths in Canada,"](#) Steven Bittle, Ashley Chen, Jasmine Hébert, *Labour, Journal of Canadian Labour Studies*, Vol. 82 (2018).

2. See: ["The Injustice Faced by General Electric Workers in Peterborough,"](#) Interview, Sue James, Chair, GE Occupational Health Advisory Committee, *Ontario Political Forum*, May 10, 2018.

See also: ["Peterborough General Electric Retirees' Proposals for Workers' Compensation Reforms,"](#) *Workers' Forum*, June 5, 2018.

3. See: ["Standing Up for Injured Workers in Northern Ontario: Four Successful Days of Action in Support of the Rights of Injured Workers,"](#) *Ontario Political Forum*, May 31, 2018.

(With files from CBC.)



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## Day of Mourning 2019 -- Photos

Quebec City, QC







Drummondville, QC



Ottawa, ON





Kingston, ON



Barrie, ON



Toronto, ON





Mississauga, ON



Hamilton, ON



Oakville, ON; St. Catharines, ON



London, ON





**Windsor, ON**



**Winnipeg, MB**



**Edmonton, AB**





Calgary, AB



Vancouver, BC



Prince George, BC



(Photos: Workers' Forum, FTQ, M. Brault, TAWC, HLC, MFL, VBTC.)



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## **Coverage of May Day and the Fight to Defend Public Health Care in Ontario**



**Rally for public health care, Queen's Park April 30, 2019, to be covered in May 4 issue of *TML Weekly*.**

Every week, *TML Weekly* features in-depth coverage and analysis of matters of concern to the Canadian polity, dealing with important developments at home and abroad. It gives expression to the concerns of working people and provides coherence to all those taking part in the movement for peace, justice and political empowerment.

The next issue of *TML Weekly*, dated May 4, will feature coverage of activities held in Canada and worldwide to mark May Day, the international day of working class unity and struggle, including an extensive photo review.

Also featured will be coverage of the April 30 Ontario Rally for Public Health Care, that brought together health care workers and others as part of the broad resistance to the anti-social offensive of the Ford government against public health care and other social programs that ensure the people's well-being.

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