

May 16, 2019

Mass Family Solidarity March with Locked-Out ABI Workers

**All Out May 25 to Support the ABI
Workers -- Their Fight is Our Fight!**



Trois-Rivières

Saturday, May 25 -- 10:30 am

Outside the Cogeco Amphitheatre at 100 Draveurs Avenue

For information and buses from across Quebec [see here](#).

Steelworkers in District 6 (Ontario and Atlantic Provinces) interested in organizing buses to Trois-Rivières, contact Tony DePaulo at the district office: 416-243-8792 or d6@usw.ca

- **ABI Workers and Allies Present Their Case to Alcoa Shareholders at Pittsburgh Annual Meeting**
- **Discussion of the Alcoa/Rio Tinto-Government Dictated Contract and Back-to-Work Protocol at ABI - Interview, Alexandre Fréchette, President, Alma Aluminum Workers' Union, United Steelworkers Local 9490**

Lockout at Glencore's Smelter in Belledune, New Brunswick

- **Workers Demand Withdrawal of Reckless Concessionary Demands**

36th Annual Ontario Injured Workers' Day

- **Province-Wide Actions Build Momentum for June 1 and "Workers' Comp Is a Right!" Campaign**

100th Anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike

- **Canadian Workers' Proud History of Organized Resistance and Defence of Rights**

Mass Family Solidarity March with Locked-Out ABI Workers

All Out May 25 to Support the ABI Workers -- Their Fight is Our Fight!

ABI workers have been locked out for more than 16 months by the Alcoa/Rio Tinto global cartel. They are organizing a family march on Saturday May 25, in the streets of Trois-Rivières, to affirm the justness of their cause and rally people to stand with them in this important struggle for the rights of working people and the well-being of their communities.

The ABI workers have been fighting tirelessly throughout the lockout, and for many months before, to negotiate a collective agreement acceptable to themselves and to defend their union against the scheme of the global cartel to destroy it.

The ABI workers are calling on everyone to march together to support their struggle, as one that affects the rights and working and living standards of all and the well-being of the communities where they live. Their struggle is in defence of terms of employment at a modern acceptable standard in the Mauricie and Centre-du-Québec Region and throughout Quebec and Canada.



All dignified working people find it unacceptable that a global cartel refuses to negotiate with those who do the work and their representatives. Instead, the cartel is using its massive social wealth, and production from other aluminum facilities it controls, to lock out workers for months on end and force them to accept working conditions that will drive down conditions generally throughout the region and Canada itself. In this battle for rights and a standard of living acceptable to those who do the work, the Quebec government is bringing shame on itself for not coming to the defence of its own people but rather acting like a flunkey of the global cartel. The government is openly siding with the cartel's demands to outsource work, lower the standard of living in the region and destroy the union. The government is even allowing Alcoa not to pay for its contracted electricity during the lockout, energy which Hydro-Quebec has prepared, budgeted for and set aside for the monopoly at preferential rates thus creating a direct loss to the Quebec people of hundreds of millions of dollars.

All Out May 25!

The Quebec Steelworkers are organizing buses from several regions to travel to Trois-Rivières:

Côte-Nord, Gaspésie-Bas-St-Laurent, Nord-du-Québec, Saguenay-Lac-St-Jean, Québec, Laurentides-Lanaudière, Montérégie, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Estrie, Montreal and Outaouais. Buses will leave from different cities in these regions. USW District 6 has announced the participation of Ontario Steelworkers, who are also renting buses for the occasion. USW District 6 also represents steelworkers in the Atlantic provinces who also support the just cause of ABI workers.

Workers' Forum calls on all workers and their families to participate in the march to make it the greatest possible success. *Workers' Forum* will be there and will report on the action, with photos and interviews. In this issue, we include an interview with Alexandre Fréchette, President of the Alma Aluminum Workers' Union. Based on the actual experience of Alma workers during and following their 2012 lockout by Rio Tinto, President Fréchette gives details to expose the fraudulent nature of the Minister of Labour's settlement proposal, which totally sides with the global cartel and negates the rights of ABI workers.



From the beginning of this unjust lockout and refusal of the global cartel to negotiate, an important factor sustaining the workers at ABI and allowing them to continue their struggle has been the organized support, including financial support, that other workers have sent to them. They have received financial support from over 400 local unions in Quebec, Canada, the United States, Australia and Guatemala. In this important way workers themselves have taken the initiative to counter the huge global power of the oligopolies such as Alcoa and Rio Tinto and the governments that do their bidding, such as the Quebec government. The global cartels are possessed with

the singular aim of maximum private profit regardless of the effects on the working people, the social and natural environment and the nation. Working people can counter this global power with our human power and determination to defend our rights, communities and nation.

On May 25, let us all go to Trois-Rivières to show our support for the just cause of the ABI workers and their families and communities and tell Alcoa/Rio Tinto in no uncertain terms that we stand with the workers and their families and communities. We are one with their struggle and together we can make a difference in this battle with a global giant. Together we can make a contribution to the struggle of all workers for their rights in these most difficult times of the anti-social offensive and nation-wrecking by the ruling financial oligarchy.

The Alcoa/Rio Tinto cartel must negotiate a collective agreement with its workers and reach an acceptable arrangement the workers can accept. The cartel must give up its attempts to silence the workers and smash their union. Workers are the essential human factor and have rights and a voice that must be heard with regards to their working and living conditions and the direction of the economy and nation.

***All Out for the May 25 March!
Full Support for the Just Struggle of the ABI Workers!***



ABI Workers and Allies Present Their Case to Alcoa Shareholders at Pittsburgh Annual Meeting



Close to 200 ABI workers and allies demonstrated in the streets of Pittsburgh on May 8, where Alcoa's annual meeting of shareholders was being held. The demonstrators called for a negotiated agreement and an end to the 16-month lockout. Workers also addressed the shareholders' meeting, backing up their demand that the company negotiate a collective agreement acceptable to those who do the work.

Alcoa's headquarters are located in Pittsburgh. The fact that 200 of the 1,030 ABI workers made the 13-hour bus trip shows their determination to uphold the dignity of labour and their community.

The workers met with members of the Alcoa and Arconic unions in the United States to discuss their experience and share their concerns. Arconic was formed out of the splitting of Alcoa in 2016 into two separate entities. Alcoa has retained the extraction and production of bauxite and the production of alumina and primary aluminum while Arconic focuses on the processing of aluminum and other light metals into manufactured products for the aerospace, automobile and other sectors.

The workers also met with USW International President Leo Gerard, who said the union is pressuring Alcoa to sign a collective agreement that is acceptable to the ABI workers. Steelworkers in the U.S. are currently trying to negotiate a master agreement with Alcoa and Arconic. Gerard said the USW has told the employer representatives that the Bécancour conflict is damaging their own negotiations and making them more difficult.

ABI workers were accompanied by a delegation of steelworkers from the Rio Tinto aluminum smelter in Alma who are members of USW Local 9490. U.S. workers from Alcoa and Arconic joined with them to demonstrate in the streets of the city with flags and banners raised. They ended their demonstration in front of the doors of the hotel where the annual meeting of shareholders was being held.

Equipped with shareholders' proxies, workers intervened in the Alcoa meeting to tell shareholders that the lockout, which has now lasted more than 16 months, is unacceptable to all concerned. An international USW leader told shareholders that it is striking that the name Alcoa is associated with problems in so many places where it operates. He mentioned Australia, Spain and now Canada. In Australia in 2018, Alcoa demanded and received approval from the state Labour Relations Tribunal to cancel the collective agreement covering 1,500 workers. Alcoa and the state Tribunal used a

fraudulent and arrogant pretext that the collective agreement does not allow the company to be flexible and competitive in global markets. At the end of 2018, Alcoa announced the closure of two smelters in Spain, provoking a fight that workers and their communities continue to wage.

Clément Masse, President of USW Local 9700 representing the ABI workers, also spoke at the shareholders' meeting. He told *Workers' Forum* that his speech raised the values that Alcoa claims to defend. "I told them that Alcoa says that one of the values it defends is the environment. I asked them 'what does Alcoa do with the social environment?' I told them that the social environment has deteriorated with the conflict that has affected the community. Many people are affected. This has to be taken into account too." President Masse also told shareholders that the Alcoa plant in Bécancour performs well, the workforce has great expertise, and shareholders are losing a lot of money for no reason. They have everything to gain by demanding Alcoa executives sign a negotiated agreement to end the lockout. Alcoa CEO Roy Harvey responded that he was concerned, but made no further comment.

According to Clément Masse, shareholders listened attentively to the message from the workers, and some came to shake hands with them following their intervention. ABI worker representatives also met with two executives from Alcoa's Pittsburgh headquarters and presented their concerns.





(Photos: Metallos)



Discussion of the Alcoa/Rio Tinto-Government Dictated Contract and Back-to-Work Protocol at ABI

- Interview, Alexandre Fréchette, President, Alma Aluminum Workers' Union, United Steelworkers Local 9490 -

In this interview, President Fréchette points out that the Quebec Labour Minister Jean Boulet before entering government worked as a lawyer for Heenan Blaikie and had various contracts to represent ABI. "To see how he acts, how he systematically favours the employer and puts pressure on the workers, I think we can ask very serious questions and certainly at least say that this minister is not neutral in the conflict," President Fréchette says.



Mass rally for Alma aluminum workers, March 31, 2012.

Workers' Forum: In his April 17 proposal for a settlement of the ABI conflict, Quebec Labour Minister Jean Boulet said that he took into account the Rio Tinto lockout of 2012 in Alma. He suggested he was in fact faithful to what happened in Alma to achieve a similar result for the current lockout at ABI. Can you tell us more about the actual situation as it unfolded after the lockout at Alma?



Alexandre Fréchette, President of USW Local 9490, expresses support of the Alma aluminum workers at a rally for the ABI workers on February 8, 2018.

Alexandre Fréchette: Regarding the duration of the return to work period that would follow after the lockout at ABI, it is one of two things: either the minister is incompetent, or he is a liar. To try to justify his settlement proposal at ABI, the Minister says that in Alma we managed, with great difficulty, to get people back to work in six months. Hence, he proposes the ABI back-to-work protocol should provide that workers return to work within six months of the end of the lockout.

In fact, it was written in black and white in our (2012) collective agreement that the employer agreed to call back all those who were full-time employees as of December 31, 2011, no later than 90 days after restarting the very first tank. This was actually clause 13 of our collective agreement. There was even an appendix to this, a table, with the detailed restart schedule, week by week, up to 14 weeks. So within 90 days, at the most, everyone is back to work.

As I said, this agreement was actually part of our (2012) collective agreement, and is even in our 2015 collective agreement. And in fact, in Alma, the return to work was completed in 90 days. What was a little difficult in our return to work was not the time it took, but the order of recall, seniority. There were recall errors, which were actually fully compensated by the company. As for the time frame, it was fully respected.

As I said, the Minister is either an incompetent, who says things he is not familiar with, or he is well aware of what he says, knows it is a lie, and is using it against the workers.

WF: The minister also said that he has "modernized" the outsourcing clause of ABI in his settlement proposal. What has he actually done?

AF: It is very simple. In ABI's collective agreement, Alcoa has the right to subcontract work within a list of activities where subcontracting is permitted. By "modernizing" it, the minister has simply removed the list so that Alcoa can outsource jobs anywhere in the plant.

What he did was eliminate the list of jobs that can be subcontracted. This list is a constraint on the company. If I draw a parallel with Alma, in order to have a list of jobs for which outsourcing is allowed, we had to go through six months of lockout. Basically, I would say that 90 per cent of our fight was to have that list. The issue was to limit the management rights of the employer, to have a clause that limits both the amount of outsourcing and the places where it can apply.

Our outsourcing clause essentially says that management has the right to take 15 per cent of the hours worked per operation and use them in subcontracting and they have to apply (those hours) to a list of jobs that has been negotiated. It is important because we chose jobs where the harm was less; jobs in which the knowledge of the production process is not necessary; jobs, for example in material handling and related things. This is a very serious concession that the minister is introducing at ABI, and it is certain in our opinion that this is something that must be denounced loud and clear.

Just for that, just for this outsourcing clause, in my opinion this settlement proposal is worse than the offer that the company made in March, an offer that workers massively rejected. So when the minister is talking about this as if it is something incidental in this conflict, we tell him that we fought six months to get that list, and he is just taking this away in his settlement proposal. So who is he working for?

In our view, these two elements are so blatant that it is either incompetence or lies; I am not able to prove the intention with certainty. Now, if I look at the Minister's history, Mr. Boulet has already represented ABI and its contracts in the past. He dealt with contracts for ABI as a lawyer while working for Heenan Blaikie. To see how he acts, how he systematically favours the employer and puts pressure on the workers, I think we can ask very serious questions and certainly at least say that this minister is not neutral in the conflict.

(Translated from the original French by Workers' Forum. Photos: TML, Metallos)



Lockout at Glencore's Smelter in Belledune, New Brunswick

Workers Demand Withdrawal of Reckless Concessionary Demands

The lockout of workers at the Glencore smelter in Belledune, New Brunswick has now passed three weeks. Locked out workers from USW Local 7085 report they are determined to defend their rights, and demand the mining and metallurgical oligopoly Glencore retract its demands for onerous concessions.

Two members of Local 7085 plus a staff representative of the union travelled to Zug, Switzerland to take part in Glencore's annual shareholders' meeting on May 9. Supported by the IndustriAll Global Union, of which the United Steelworkers is an affiliate, they intervened in the meeting to oppose Glencore's concessionary demands on health and safety, union representation and pensions and benefits.[1] They met with the CEO of Glencore, with the board member who is chairman of the Health, Safety, Environment and Communities Committee, and with other board members.

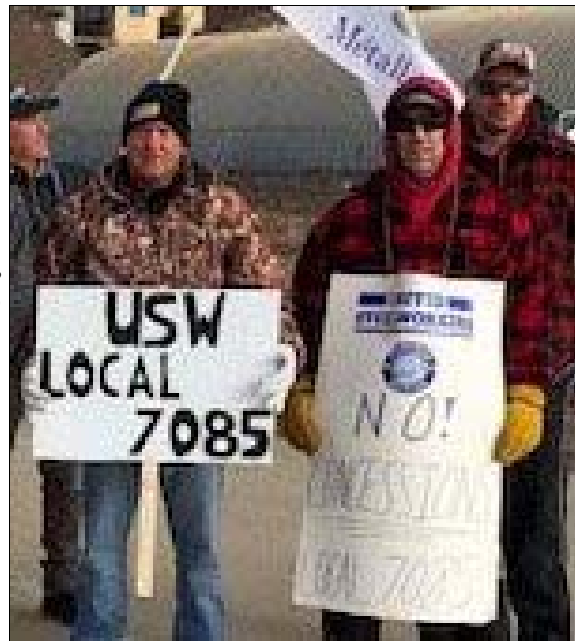


USW Local 7085 representatives took part in Glencore's annual shareholders meeting in Zug, Switzerland, May 9, 2019, to oppose company's concessionary demands.

According to a report from United Steelworkers District 6, which covers Ontario and Atlantic Canada, the Glencore workers explained the issues at the New Brunswick smelter and provided examples of harassment and an unsafe culture in the facility. The team made it clear that it expects a follow-up. The union is ready to negotiate but not on the basis of provocative anti-worker concessions, which endanger the health and safety of the workforce. If need be, the union will engage in a broad global public campaign to defend workers' rights at the smelter, the report said.

Meanwhile, locally, no contact has occurred between Glencore management and the union. The union told managers from the outset that Local 7085 is willing to go back to the bargaining table, but first the reckless concessionary demands on health and safety must be withdrawn. Workers report they remain hopeful that something positive will develop as the smelter is extremely productive, but at the same time, they are not willing to give up their just demand for the removal of Glencore's concessionary demands.

Glencore management on site continues to misinform the public by writing in the local newspapers that the dispute is over money. The president of the union Bart Dempsey told the press that of course workers would like to have a raise but the fight is not centred on wages but rather on forcing Glencore to remove their concessionary demands. As the union has repeatedly pointed out, workers at this point are basically asking to preserve what they have.



President Dempsey told *Workers' Forum* that workers are opposing Glencore's disinformation by explaining to the public the details and nature of the conflict. Up to April 2018, Glencore had not asked for any of these concessions. Management was even saying that it was willing to leave the contract exactly as is for another five years, if workers would accept a wage increase of only \$0.45 an hour.

Workers at the time said such a small raise was not acceptable especially given that they had made large concessions, including on pensions, in the 2014 contract after Glencore merged with Xstrata and acquired the smelter. However, workers said they would consider Glencore's offer during formal negotiations where the paltry offer on wages could be discussed along with certain language in the collective agreement that was of concern.

But suddenly without warning, Glencore management came up with a long list of concessions and refused to consider any proposals from the workers. Workers report they never received a formal response for discussion of their proposals. Instead, the situation degenerated into one of company dictate and extortion with the cartel's aim being to worsen working conditions and smash the union.

Proof of this intransigence came on April 24 this year, when Glencore without any notice locked out the dayshift from entering the plant prior to the start of a legal strike scheduled to begin at 6:00 pm. Instead of opposing Glencore's reckless illegal action and refusal to negotiate, the Superior Court of New Brunswick sanctioned the behaviour by granting two court orders sought by the company, which hamper the ability of the workers to mount an effective picket line in defence of their rights.

Glencore and ABI Workers Face Global Oligopolies

The similarity between the situation facing the Glencore workers in Belledune, New Brunswick and the locked out ABI workers in Bécancour, Quebec is striking. In both cases workers appeared to be close to an agreement, if only the global cartels had engaged in good faith bargaining. Far from this happening, the oligopolies soured relations and went for the jugular, attacking the workers' basic rights and trying to break the union, all the while distorting the nature of the conflict and slandering the workers by accusing them of being responsible for the lockouts.

ABI and Glencore smelter workers and working people in general have a common cause in uniting to defend their rights against the power of the oligopolies and their state representatives. Across the country, the ruling financial oligarchy with its anti-social offensive has politicized its demands, taking over state powers and getting laws changed so as to impose austerity measures which weaken and dismantle social programs and regulations so that companies cannot be held to account for bad practices. Specific attacks on workers such as at ABI, Glencore, GM and Canada Post are clearly aimed at making unions ineffective as defence organizations of the workers. The parties which form the cartel party system to make sure the people cannot speak in their own name but remain marginalized and deprived of any effective voice whatsoever are all on board. There is no end in sight to the disequilibrium in the relations between the two main social classes: those who own and control the productive forces and buy workers' capacity to work, and the workers who sell their capacity to work to those in control, without the workers taking matters into their own hands and fighting for their rights within the fight for the rights of all.

Companies and their state representatives are attempting to turn this social relation into a one-sided dictate, using their global wealth and reach and the police powers of the state to overwhelm the working class, dampen its will to fight and deny workers what belongs to them by right. The courageous examples of the ABI and Glencore workers to give rights meaning in the 21st century are historic, as was the valiant fight of Hamilton steelworkers in USW Local 1005 who, through their defence of their pensions exposed the use of insolvency law and courts to smash the unions and defend what belongs to the workers by right. They have been joined by working people in all sectors of the economy who are standing up in defence of their rights and the rights of all. These fights, along with the broad countrywide and international support the ABI and Glencore workers are receiving, demonstrate the determination of the working class to unite in defence of their dignity and rights, and to develop new methods of struggle suitable for the new conditions of disequilibrium and the power of the cartels.

Notes

1. For more information on how Glencore decreed the lockout and the anti-worker concessions it is attempting to extort, and the courageous stand of the workers of Local 7085 in defence of their rights and dignity, read ["Workers Stand Up for Their Rights and Dignity," *Workers' Forum*, May 2, 2019.](#)

(Photos: USW District 6)



36th Annual Ontario Injured Workers' Day

Province-Wide Actions Build Momentum for June 1 and "Workers' Comp Is a Right!" Campaign

36th Ontario Injured Workers' Day June 1



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

The organizations that make up the Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Groups (ONIWG) held a series of actions across the province on May 14 in the lead-up to the 36th Annual Injured Workers' Day rally at Queen's Park in Toronto, as well as in other cities on June 1.

The May 14 actions and the June 1 rallies build on the "Workers' Comp Is a Right Campaign" launched by ONIWG in 2017, to defend the rights of all by ensuring that all workers in Ontario are covered by the workers' compensation system and that the system provides injured workers with what they need to live in dignity. *Workers' Forum* calls on everyone to go all out to take part on June 1.

ONIWG explains that it launched the campaign "because we need to stand up to the injustices that are being committed against us as injured workers. For too long, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) has gotten away with violating our rights through cutbacks and austerity, with no accountability. The system has been transformed from one that is supposed to support us,

into one that is hostile to us.

"We refuse to accept this. We are taking a stand across Ontario to reclaim our voice, and to call for a strong, public workers' compensation system that operates according to its founding principles.

"With the Workers' Comp Is a Right campaign, we have injured workers throughout the entire province coming together and organizing around three key demands:

- "1. No cuts based on phantom jobs!
2. Listen to injured workers' treating healthcare professionals!
3. Stop cutting benefits based on 'pre-existing conditions'!

"Together, we are powerful, and we have the collective strength to build our movement until we achieve these demands and see justice for injured workers."

May 14 Day of Action

Toronto



London



Windsor



Barrie; Thunder Bay



(Photos: WF, ONIWG, injuredworkersonline.org)



100th Anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike

Canadian Workers' Proud History of Organized Resistance and Defence of Rights



Rally June 4, 1919, outside the building which housed the citizen's committee.

This year marks the 100th Anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike. On May First 1919, discouraged by post-war inflation and unemployment, Winnipeg's metal and building workers went on strike, demanding higher wages. Winnipeg's building trade workers walked out to gain better wages and hours. They were joined by iron workers who were fighting for company recognition of their union, the Metal Trades Council. On May 15, with the overwhelming support of its 12,000 members, the Winnipeg Labour Council called a general strike. Thirty thousand union and non-union people walked off the job. Among the first out were the city's telephone workers. Winnipeg had no phone service for a week. Strikes were organized in Edmonton and Calgary in support of the Winnipeg General Strike.

The context for this strike was the grave economic crisis in which Britain and by extension Canada found themselves following World War I, as well as the unconscionable treatment the workers received when they returned from fighting the trench warfare in which thousands were sent to the most horrible death in the euphoria for empire which preceded the war. Thousands more died following the war of the Spanish flu. The war quickly smashed that euphoria, leaving Canada at a crossroads, not only flailing in the throes of an economy whose old basis had been smashed by the war but also without an aim rooted in the former empire-building. The service of governments to alien interests and the moloch of capital, with which the workers definitely did not identify, put a severe strain on the ability of governments to maintain labour peace.

The government of Canada along with the provincial government also clearly feared a revolution

similar to the one that had just happened in Russia. They spread lies that claimed "immigrants" were behind the strike. The Government of Canada amended the *Immigration Act* so that even British-born immigrants who in those days were automatically granted citizenship rights, could be deported. It mobilized the police forces against the striking workers and resorted to violence to crush the strike. The response of government to the terrible plight the workers were in at that time clearly revealed the role of the state in suppressing the struggles of the workers who had just sacrificed so much in the trench warfare of World War I.

In June, the federal authorities officially resorted to deportation threats to suppress working class politics, even though they attempted to deceive the public by avoiding the word "political" in their accusations. Amendments to Section 41 of the *Immigration Act* defined "a prohibited immigrant" as "anyone interested in overthrowing organized government either in the Empire (at the provincial level in Canada too) or in general, or in destroying property, or promoting riot or public disorder, or belonging to a secret organization trying to control people by threat or blackmail."^[1] After nearly a month, Winnipeg's mayor called out special constables whose presence just fuelled the strikers' fire. Their leaders were arrested. The North West Mounted Police (which became the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1920) and special constables fired on the workers, killing two men. An additional 34 people were wounded and 80 arrested. A few days later, on June 21, the strike ended with a protest march organized by war veterans.

The Winnipeg General Strike became known as the largest social revolt in Canadian history which is subject of many studies relating not only to the role of the government and police forces but also to the role played by unions, communists, socialists and the traditional political parties. The significance of this strike and of the times in which it took place will be further explored for the information of our readers.





Note

1. Barbara Roberts, *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988), p. 84.

(Photos: L.B. Foote, Manitoba Public Archives)



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