

December 11, 2019

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Quebec Workers' Movement Rises to
Challenges Posed by the Times

- Pierre Chénier -



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- Pierre Chénier -

The Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) held its 32nd Congress in Quebec City from November 25 to 28 under the theme "In Action in a Changing World." Over 900 delegates took part in the proceedings. With the observers and guests, the total number of people each day in the hall was slightly over 1000. The FTQ has about 600,000 members from the private and public sectors, including construction, mining and metallurgy, communications, forestry, health care and other sectors.

The main events of the Congress were the opening speech by FTQ President Daniel Boyer, the presentation and adoption of policy papers and demands on occupational health and safety, on pharmacare, and on automation and digitalization of the economy. Workshops were also held on automation and digitalization of the economy in which delegates and observers were divided into six discussion groups. The Congress organized a mass demonstration on November 27 at the National Assembly to demand pro-worker reforms to the *Act respecting occupational health and safety*. Elections to the positions of President and Secretary General of the federation were held. Ninety-five resolutions were adopted on topics ranging from the FTQ Constitution, occupational health and safety, precarious employment and the Quebec *Labour Code*, to defence of public services and of the workers that provide them, and the natural environment, among others. There were also presentations by experts on the topics of the platform economy and on technological changes and the transformation of the workplace.

Daniel Boyer was acclaimed for a third term as FTQ President and Denis Bolduc, from the Quebec section of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, was acclaimed as Secretary General, replacing Serge Cadieux who is moving to the FTQ's Solidarity Fund.

In his opening speech, Boyer explained that the theme "In action in a changing world" refers mainly to environmental change and automation and digitalization of the economy and the impact of these developments on labour, jobs and rights. The FTQ, he said, is working for a just transition for workers and unions in response to these changes. Other challenges, he said, are to preserve and rebuild public services and to improve working conditions in the sector, improve health and safety conditions for all workers, and the need for pharmacare.

According to Boyer, the framework under which the FTQ is working is the preservation of the Quebec model of the Quiet Revolution and its adaptation to the new realities so that Quebec becomes greener, more just, with fewer inequalities and more solidarity and that the FTQ remains a recognized and legitimate player in Quebec society.

Throughout the Congress, workers spoke eloquently about the problems and challenges they are facing.

The Congress demanded the establishment of a publicly managed, universal, accessible, fair, viable and independent pharmacare system in Quebec.

On the issue of social programs and public services, workers demanded immediate substantial improvements for the most vulnerable workers, especially those who work in public and private seniors' residences. Many workers intervened to say that their contribution in caring for those who built the modern Quebec must be recognized, especially in terms of wages which remain abysmal and make it impossible to retain and attract workers in the sector. The whole Congress rejected

with contempt the statement of Quebec Premier François Legault, who said his government would not negotiate with the workers providing public services but would impose wage settlements limited to the cost of living for most workers and slightly more for beneficiary attendants and low-paid teachers.



Demonstration during the FTQ Congress in support of striking workers in private seniors' residences, November 26, 2019.

The discussion on occupational health and safety took place in the context of the Quebec government's announcement that in 2020 it will amend both the *Act respecting occupational health and safety* and the *Act respecting industrial accidents and occupational diseases*. Delegates denounced the fact that 40 years after the *Act respecting occupational health and safety* was passed, its four prevention mechanisms are applicable to only 12 per cent of Quebec workers.[1]

Article 2 of the Act says: "The object of this Act is the elimination, at the source, of dangers to the health, safety and physical well-being of workers. This Act provides mechanisms for the participation of workers, workers' associations, employers and employers' associations in the realization of its object."

That is not true, workers said, and deeds of government belie its words. Construction workers gave the example of the crane operators who are under vicious attack by the Quebec government and the Quebec Construction Commission who have reduced the training standard for these workers, which puts not only their lives at risk but the lives of the public as well. This is done, among other things, under the hoax of fighting what they call the attempt of the crane operators' union to exercise control over other unions representing other construction trades, as if this was a power struggle between different unions. This is a good illustration of what kind of "participation of workers, workers' associations" this Act contemplates. Changes have to be made on the ground, workers said, with workers having a decisive say to determine the health and safety conditions at their worksites and how they are protected by the Act, with all the prevention mechanisms in the law applicable to all workers. Workers also said that adequate compensation has to be provided to all workers who are injured or become ill at work. They demanded the end of employers' systematic challenges of workers' compensation claims because this deprives the injured workers of the money they need, money which belongs to them by right and is essential for them to live a dignified life. These challenges and deprivation makes their injuries and illness even worse.

Workers also spoke eloquently on the issue of automation and digitalization of the economy. They support technological change, which should improve their lives at work, but in the hands of the private monopolies is being turned into a gigantic dehumanizing and spying machine used against them. As one worker said in one of the workshops, "Robots are turning us into robots." He explained that all the actions of workers on the job are being spied on electronically and then companies make accusations against the workers, demanding to know what they were doing at

such and such a time since they seem to have not been moving. Companies monitor the pace of work achieved by workers, and once a worker exceeds the standard, even once, their performance becomes the new mandatory standard for all, set without discussion or input from the workers. Others explained that metadata gathered by the companies includes a great deal of personal information on individuals which is used against them. For example, workers' comments on social media are routinely spied on by companies which then discipline workers for alleged 'lack of loyalty' to the company. Metadata is being used to spot those who may become labour activists or may want to unionize, so as to take repressive action against them.



Demonstration at the National Assembly to Demand Pro-Worker Reform of the Act respecting occupational health and safety, November 27, 2019.

There were many interventions in the workshops on what is called the platform economy, with monopolies like Uber or Amazon claiming that their digital platforms make them mere intermediaries between different users. This is used to deny any link of employment with people working for them and therefore any obligation to provide pensions and benefits and anything else that may be claimed by workers through regular employment. Those workers are often fraudulently labelled "self-employed" and live a life of total instability and often of extreme poverty while totally dependent on these monopolies for their living.

Many demands were put forward such as amendments to both the Canada and Quebec Labour Codes to change the definition of "employee" so it includes these workers who are falsely labelled as self-employed. Workers also demanded the strengthening of privacy laws to prohibit companies

keeping personal information on workers without their permission.

The main point that workers made is that all of this is making it very difficult for workers to affirm their collective strength and to wage an organized collective struggle for their rights. New forms have to be found, workers said, to solve the problem of exercising the organized strength of the collective of workers, their ability to discuss and work out stands that are favourable to themselves and society, and to fight for them in an effective way. Workers are not distressed by these problems but are actively working to find new ways of organizing that are appropriate in the existing conditions.

It is becoming more and more clear that workers' reference point when they wage struggles is not a desire for the past and forms belonging to a civil society that has been wrecked. The workers' reference point is their current fight for rights which they are waging in the battlefield of public opinion. It is in these battles that new forms are being created which correspond to the content workers are bringing forward, including a new direction for the economy that serves the people and not the rich and over which the people can exercise control.

The workers' interventions allowed them to work out how the problems they face pose themselves and expressed their determination to overcome the challenges. This made for an exciting and lively FTQ Congress.

Note

1. These mechanisms are the prevention program, the health program, the employer-worker joint health/safety committee and the prevention representative.

(Photos: FTQ)



Interview

Urgent Need to Improve Wages and Working Conditions of Seniors' Residences Employees

- Sylvie Thomassin, Union Delegate, Quebec Union of Service Employees-FTQ -



Strike days at Seniors' Private Residences in Quebec, November 2019.

Workers' Forum: Workers in seniors' residences, public and private, are fighting for immediate and urgent improvements in their working conditions. You work at the Manoir et Cours de l'Atrium, a private seniors' residence. Can you tell us about these conditions?

Sylvie Thomassin: Our situation is particularly difficult at the moment because we are short of staff. We have to deal with this every day because we do not have many regular employees. We deal with agencies to get workers and have to adapt to the people they send to us. We have a work routine. When the workers from the agencies arrive at our institutions they do not know how they work. Practically every day we have to do training to show them how we operate in the residence. This creates extra work and also extra stress, because at the wages the agencies are paying, the people they recruit frequently do not show up for work. So it's more work that has to be done by our members.

Owners of private residences have difficulty recruiting a regular workforce. All goes well until it comes to the question of wages. The moment we come to the question of wages, people who would be interested in coming to work with us give up. We try to make the employer understand that the wages are not competitive, that's why they have trouble getting people. The employer persists in saying that we are in a labour shortage, without wanting to get to the bottom of the problem. We have dishwashers who make as little as \$13 an hour. We do not have a pension plan and have no health insurance, no drug insurance.

We work for a company that is listed on the stock exchange, Chartwell, one of the biggest players in private residences for seniors. Chartwell makes millions every year. We take care of the people from whom they are making money. At the Manoir et Cours de l'Atrium the cheapest apartment costs about \$3,000 a month. Our residence has 680 apartments. It is the largest private residence for seniors in Quebec.

Yet at the bargaining table, the employer says it has no money to give to the employees to keep them in its establishments. Meanwhile, Chartwell private residences continue to open. The company already has difficulty putting staff in the existing residences yet is opening new ones. What kind of service will the people get at these residences?

Our wages are much lower than in the public sector. Our nurses work double shifts too. In our residence, we are currently experiencing an outbreak of gastroenteritis. Our dining room waitstaff are delivering meals on the floors because one of the dining rooms has been closed. It is a huge increase in the work load. The employer asks us to do this and we do it, but we are offered nothing in return. It's pure exploitation. It is normal for our people to think of going to work elsewhere.

In its advertising, Chartwell speaks about the well-being of older people, but does not provide the staff needed to actually do so. I went back to school at age 50 to get a cooking degree to gain advancement. I have not been paid much more for this. The employer is asking for skills qualifications but does not want to pay for qualifications.

We are not currently in negotiations, but we support those who are. Some are staging one-day strikes at this time. Employees are demanding a wage of \$15 at the time of hiring and a minimum increase of \$1 per hour each year for the duration of the agreement. We will be negotiating next fall.

Something also has to be done at the government level. The government needs to step in and make employers understand that they have to sit down at the bargaining table, raise the wages, listen to the unions and the members they represent, who have legitimate demands.

The Quebec Union of Service Employees (SQEES) and the whole Quebec Federation of Labour

are also demanding that the Legault government introduce a collective agreement decree to improve the lot of those who work in seniors' residences. This decree would set the minimum conditions of employment that all employers in the sector must respect.

WF: Is there anything you would like to add in conclusion?

ST: I hope that the people will support our demands and our actions because it is important. We must keep in mind that we too will one day find ourselves in these residences. We must not allow conditions to deteriorate as is happening now. We must respect the dignity of the elderly. They need stability. Anything can destabilize them. When you're old, you're vulnerable. Seniors need to be cared for by people who also have stability in their working conditions. We do not get recognition for the work we do and that must change.

(Translated from the original French by Workers' Forum. Photo: SQEES-FTQ)



No to Nation-Wrecking!

Lowe's Companies Inc. Shuttters 34 Stores Across Canada

In a surprise announcement on November 20, Lowe's Companies Inc. from the U.S. said it was closing 34 stores in Canada, most of which it seized only recently with its takeover of RONA in 2016. The U.S. retail giant said it will close 26 RONAs, six Lowe's, and two Réno-Dépôts this coming January and February. Almost a third of the closures are in Quebec, where 12 stores are affected. Nine stores will be closed in Ontario, six in Alberta, three in Nova Scotia, three in BC and one in Saskatchewan.[1]

The 34 closures bring to 61 the number of Canadian stores Lowe's has shuttered during the last two years. It closed 27 Canadian locations in 2018 -- 24 of them recently bought RONAs -- along with regional support centres in Mississauga, Ontario and St. John's, Newfoundland, a truss plant in St. John's, Newfoundland and a block plant in Kamloops, BC. Just last month Lowe's terminated 60 workers at its Canadian headquarters in Boucherville, Quebec. Lowe's did not say how many workers' lives will be turned upside down this time with the loss of their work and livelihoods.

RONA was founded in 1939 in Quebec and soon became a large retail marketer for hardware goods and building supplies. As such, it developed a relationship with both the forestry industry in Quebec and building contractors. The rise of RONA as a chain of big box stores corresponds with the general decline of the small family business in the retail sector throughout the imperialist system of states and the trend towards concentration of the socialized economy, social wealth and political power into fewer and fewer private hands. This trend, left unchecked, has resulted in a growing dominance over Canada by the U.S. financial oligarchy.[2] As continental integration into the U.S. Empire proceeded unabated, the result has been a Fortress North America and the loss of any semblance of local, Quebec or Canadian control of the economy.



As can be seen from the list of store locations to be closed, they are mostly in smaller communities where the oligarchs in control of Lowe's do not consider the scale of operations to be sufficiently lucrative. The trend of imperialism militates against rational nation-building in favour of the pursuit of maximum profit without regard for the lives and well-being of the people or local economies and Mother Earth. Working people, especially the youth, have been forced to seek work in ever larger metropolises such as Montreal, Toronto or the BC lower mainland.

In the regions of Quebec and elsewhere, such as in Prince George in BC, the Lowe's-forced closures appear in part to be connected with attacks on the local economies, such as the forestry sector and other industries. A lack of investments to diversify local economies has made them vulnerable to crises. The working people of Bécancour, which will lose its RONA store, recently had to endure an 18-month Alcoa/Rio Tinto lockout of 1,000 ABI smelter workers, aided and abetted by the Quebec government and Hydro-Quebec.

RONA stores in Bécancour, Nicolet, and Trois-Rivières, as well as the Réno-Dépôt in Trois-Rivières and a Lowe's in Prince George, among others in smaller centres, are earmarked for closure. These attacks on the regions are forms of nation-wrecking to serve the profit-mad international financial oligarchy whose considerations are based on sucking out tribute from around the world to satisfy their private interests.

The working people cannot and will not accept these assaults on the economic and social fabric of their lives. Nation-wrecking reflects the lack of control the working people have over their economy and the events that affect their lives. An alternative is possible! Join the determined movement for democratic renewal and empowerment of the people so together we can bring into being a new pro-social direction for the economy that favours the people and a nation-building project in opposition to the power, control and wrecking of the international financial oligarchy.

Notes

1. List of store closures announced by Lowe's on November 20:

British Columbia		Closing date
Lowe's Prince George	2999 Massey Drive	February 19, 2020
RONA Surrey (Newton)	6965 King George Boulevard	January 31, 2020
RONA Osoyoos	6014-51 Street	January 31, 2020
Alberta		
Lowe's Calgary - Shawnessy	295 Shawville Boulevard S.E.	February 19, 2020
RONA Airdrie	2649 Main Street South	January 31, 2020
RONA Calgary (Midnapore)	14815 Bannister Road S.E.	January 31, 2020
RONA St. Albert	730 St. Albert Trail	January 31, 2020
RONA Sherwood Park	340 Baseline Road	January 31, 2020
RONA Edmonton (Ellerslie Road)	1003 Parsons Road S.W.	January 31, 2020
Saskatchewan		
Lowe's Regina - North	489 Albert Street North	February 19, 2020
Ontario		
Lowe's Etobicoke - North	48 Lowe's Place	January 31, 2020
Lowe's Thunder Bay	1000 Fort William Road	January 31, 2020
Lowe's Cornwall	950 Brookdale Avenue	January 31, 2020
RONA Brockville	550 Stewart Boulevard	January 31, 2020

Home & Garden RONA - Cambridge	66 Pinebush Road	January 31, 2020
RONA Mississauga	Rockwood Mall, 4141 Dixie Road	January 31, 2020
Reno-Depot Aurora	140 First Commerce Drive	January 31, 2020
RONA Oshawa	1279 Simcoe Street North	January 31, 2020
RONA Ajax	19 Notion Road	January 31, 2020
Quebec		
RONA Granby	316 rue Denison Est	January 31, 2020
RONA Sorel	1293 chemin des Patriotes	January 31, 2020
RONA Bécancour	3365 boulevard Bécancour	January 31, 2020
RONA Nicolet	2145 boulevard Louis-Frédette	January 31, 2020
RONA Saint-Tite	700 rue Notre-Dame	January 31, 2020
RONA Trois-Rivières	15 rue Philippe-Francoeur	January 31, 2020
RONA Saint-Félix-de-Valois	3110 rue Henri-L. Chevette	January 31, 2020
RONA Carignan	2395 chemin de Chambly	January 31, 2020
RONA Saint-Lambert	707 rue Saint-Charles	January 31, 2020
RONA Saint-Sauveur	180 rue Principale	January 31, 2020
RONA Bellefeuille - Saint-Jérôme	905 boulevard de la Salette	January 31, 2020
Réno-Dépôt Trois-Rivières	4575 boulevard des Forges	January 31, 2020
Nova Scotia		
RONA Dartmouth (Windmill Road)	500 Windmill Road	February 19, 2020
RONA Dartmouth (Harbour)	1000 Cole Harbour Road	February 19, 2020
RONA Bedford	1658 Bedford Place Mall	February 19, 2020

2. Other recent U.S. imperialist attacks on the retail sector in Canada:

Target and Zellers Closures: Disastrous Years for Workers, Suppliers and Others (*Excerpt*)

By 2014, Target had renovated and opened 133 stores across Canada, most of them former Zellers leaseholds, hiring 17,600 workers and selling pharmacy franchises for most stores. Suddenly on January 15, 2015, Target filed for bankruptcy protection for its Canadian operations under the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA) and announced the closure of all its operations within two months. All its workers were told they were fired and pharmacy franchise operations and coffee shops were discontinued. Once again, retail workers became collateral damage in an economic system that is destructive, to say the least, and over which they have no control or say. (*TML Weekly*, February 14, 2015.)

Lowe's' Stalking of RONA and the Failure of Canada's Political Institutions and Leaders to Defend Nation-Building

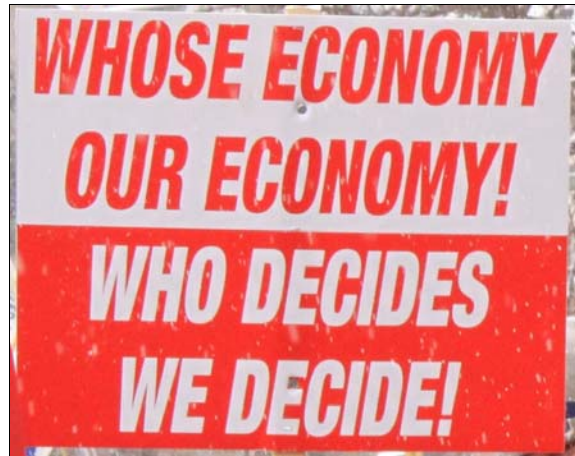
- K.C. Adams -

The significance of the takeover of RONA is found in the revelation that local people and especially the working class have no control over the direction of the economy. They do not have control where profits go and are invested, where the commodities a company sells are bought or

sourced, how a company can be renewed to better serve the economy and people, and fundamentally, whether a company will live or die. Also revealed is the fact that the people cannot find help from the so-called liberal democratic institutions as they have proved in practice to be impotent in the face of the attacks of the global financial oligarchy and do its bidding.

The U.S. giant corporation Lowe's began its campaign to seize RONA in 2012. Similar to other dominant companies in the retail sector, such as Walmart and the internet giant Amazon, Lowe's is not a company unto itself but a merged financial, industrial, commercial and real estate empire controlled by the financial oligarchy.

The public rumblings of a Lowe's takeover of RONA began in earnest in July 2012 prior to a Quebec election. The noise of a U.S. takeover provoked a reaction in the mass media and amongst the cartel political parties vying for power. They all pronounced themselves in favour of "doing something" to block Lowe's takeover of RONA.



The "doing something" was described in the media as "government-controlled or government-friendly financial institutions collectively but independently acquiring a blocking position in the shareholders' equity of 'strategic' companies." [1] Only a few years later in 2016, both the federal and Quebec governments and the "government-friendly financial institutions" that took an ownership position in RONA stock capitulated when Lowe's returned with an "offer they and the government of the day couldn't refuse." RONA was sold to Lowe's because without upholding principles of nation-building, pragmatism rules the day; this means those in control can find and propagate an excuse to capitulate to the power of the global financial oligarchy.



Opposition parties in the Quebec National Assembly criticized the Liberal government of Phillip Couillard for allowing RONA's sale to Lowe's, with some members even predicting disaster for the regions. On the receiving end of particularly heavy abuse was Minister of the Economy Jacques Daoust, who had been President and Chief Executive of Investissement Québec (IQ) from 2008 to 2013 before entering the Liberal cartel party government as an elected member of the National Assembly in 2014. Under Daoust's direction, IQ acquired a 10 per cent stake in RONA so that -- presumably as a "government-controlled financial institution" -- it could help save RONA from a foreign takeover. However, when Lowe's offer to buy became real in 2016 the resistance caved in to pragmatism. IQ and the Liberal governments in

both Ottawa and Quebec (including Jacques Daoust the Minister of the Economy) officially approved the sale.

Soon after RONA's sale to Lowe's was announced and approved by the Couillard government in 2016, Jacques Daoust resigned as Minister of the Economy. Later in the year, he resigned from the National Assembly and died suddenly in 2017 from a stroke. His personal papers, made public

after his death, reveal that in fact he had been opposed all along to the RONA sale. According to Daoust, Premier Couillard's Office concluded the sale behind his back without his knowledge. In his memoir, he accuses the Liberal government or more specifically the Premier's Office of pressuring him, after the fact, to agree to the sale as Minister of the Economy and then lie in public that he participated in making the legal and political arrangements for the sale and was in complete agreement.

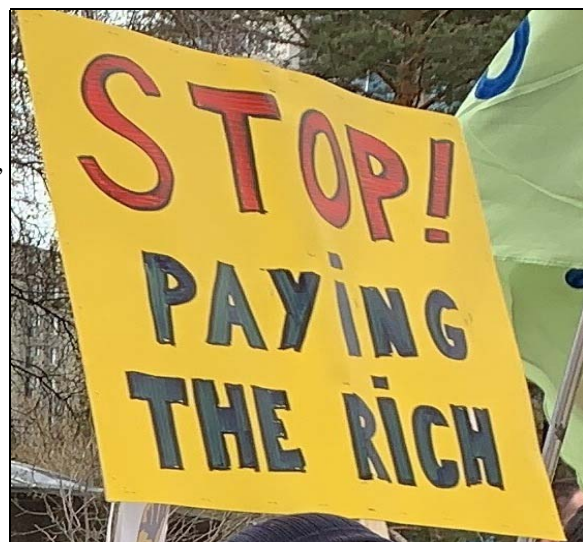
Within two years following RONA's sale to Lowe's, the axe began to fall, described by financial analyst Yvan Allaire as, "pressure in the markets [on Lowe's CEO and Board] for lacklustre performance. Its Canadian operations [i.e., RONA] had become a drag on earnings. [...] Lowe's is listed on the New York Stock Exchange and thus must deliver on the only commitment that really counts: doing everything to maintain and drive up the price of its stock. At stake in that very real day-to-day drama are the jobs of its senior executives and the quantum of their compensation. Any hesitation or delay in taking all necessary measures to meet the shareholders' expectations will be severely and swiftly punished. That is the inexorable law of financial markets." One cannot help but comment that "at stake in that very real day-to-day drama are the jobs" of the men and women who work at RONA and the communities and local economies where the closures occur.

Lowe's first wave of closures of RONA stores was announced just one month after the Coalition Avenir Québec cartel party government of François Legault took power in October 2018, with the second wave a year later for a total of 61 stores closed across Canada. The response of the CAQ in power has been quite different than when in opposition when it denounced the Liberal Party government for agreeing to the sale.

The CAQ Minister of the Economy, Pierre Fitzgibbon, went so far as to blame Quebecers for the closures, lamenting a weakening of their emotional attachment to the RONA brand since the Lowe's takeover. "There's a breakage of emotional connection between Quebecers and RONA and I understand why," Fitzgibbon told reporters, saying he too prefers to shop at Quebec-owned stores. Fitzgibbon added that the CAQ government could do nothing because it was bound by a confidentiality agreement between Lowe's and the federal government, signed during the takeover in 2016. Some people working in RONA stores denounced Fitzgibbon for suggesting the closures were fine by him because he "prefers to shop at Quebec-owned stores." They pointed out that the workers suffering the layoffs are Quebecers, and that the other big-box building supply store company in Quebec, Home Depot, is also not Quebec-owned.

Lowe's said the closures are in compliance with the 2016 purchase agreement signed with the federal government. The Trudeau government appears to agree and will not intervene. A statement from the federal Ministry of Innovation, Science and Economic Development says it closely monitors these commitments "on an ongoing basis to ensure compliance."

CAQ Minister Fitzgibbon remarked that compliance was not very difficult: "Let's be realistic, this agreement is on a page and a half. So the commitment on that page is kind of soft. [...] My job is just to call the federal government to make sure they enforce what they signed in 2016. But it's pretty soft."



CAQ Premier François Legault, who in 2016 criticized the Couillard Liberal government for not blocking the sale, describes the two waves of RONA store closures under his government as

"unfortunate," adding nothing can be done because "RONA is owned by Lowe's. It's a private company."

The impotence of the so-called liberal democratic institutions is on full display at all levels of government in this affair. The form and content of those institutions are incapable of defending the people, economy and nation-building from the ravages of the global financial oligarchy.

Democratic renewal and empowerment of the people are the order of the day to defend the people's rights and interests and forge a new pro-social direction for the economy that favours the people.

Note

1. All quotes are from "Rona's tragedy in three acts: From Quebec's foreign takeover block, to deal with Lowe's, to store closures," Yvan Allaire, *Financial Post*, November 22, 2019.

(With files from Radio-Canada, CBC News, CTV, Reuters, National Post.)



Fix Workers' Comp Now!

Ontario Injured Workers Hold Spirited Rally at Ministry of Labour



Injured workers and their allies rallied at the Ministry of Labour on December 9 demanding the Ford government stop its attacks on injured workers and take two immediate actions to fix problems in the Workers' Compensation system as well as the provincial regulations governing workplace safety. Their first demand is that the government pass private member's Bill 119, currently before the legislature, which would end the practice of deeming. This practice impoverishes injured workers by cutting their benefits based on considering them to be employed at non-existent jobs. Secondly, they demand that section 83(4) of the current *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act*, which holds employers, not the temp agencies responsible when temp agency workers are injured or killed at their places of work, be brought into force.

The injured workers' call to Fix It Now! is also a demand that the Ontario government end the situation where millions of dollars are handed to employers through lower WSIB premiums while injured workers are denied benefits. To Fix It Now! also requires implementation of the other demands of the Workers' Comp Is a Right! campaign: listen to injured workers' treating physicians, not paper doctors; reverse the cuts to legal aid; and end the denial of claims on the grounds of so-called pre-existing conditions.

This year's action was organized by the Ontario Network of Injured Workers' Groups (ONIWG)

together with the \$15 and Fairness Campaign. The organizations who participated included the United Steelworkers, Workers Action Centre, the OFL Power of Many campaign, injured workers legal aid clinics, Injured Workers Action for Justice, Canadian Federation of Students, and the Workers' Centre of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist). "Workers' Comp Is a Right" ponchos were donated by the railway workers union. Both new and seasoned injured workers' activists participated in the spirited action, with two new members proudly hoisting the ONIWG banner in the steady rain.

The annual Christmas actions, which have taken place for the past 28 years, highlight the hardships faced by injured workers and their families during the holidays, as well as their impoverishment throughout the year. This year has been particularly difficult with the brutal attacks of the Ford government on social programs relied upon by all Ontario workers, as well as cuts to the funding of specialized legal clinics on which injured workers depend for legal assistance and advocacy for their rights.



Actions also took place in Sudbury and Windsor. In Sudbury a small but lively information picket took place, while the main rally was rescheduled to December 16 due to poor weather.

Windsor



Sudbury



(Photos: WF, ONIWG, Sudbury Injured Workers' Education and Action Centre, Windsor Injured Workers)



British Columbia

Tentative Agreement Reached for SkyTrain Workers

After close to an 18-hour bargaining session, negotiators for 900 SkyTrain workers, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 7000, reached a tentative agreement with the BC Rapid Transit Company (BCRTC) just minutes before 5:00 am on December 10 when workers were set to begin strike action. The workers are train and station attendants, control operators, administration staff, technicians and maintenance workers. BCRTC is a wholly owned subsidiary of TransLink, the provincial government legislative body which oversees public transit operations in Metro Vancouver.

According to a *Vancouver Sun* report published shortly after the tentative agreement was reached, CUPE Local 7000 President Tony Rebelo stated that it "goes a long way to address many of the union's concerns..." No details will be released before the ratification vote. Negotiations for a new

contract have been ongoing since August 31 when the old contract expired. The union served 72-hour strike notice on December 6, following a 96.8 per cent vote in favour of job action.

Workers are seeking wages acceptable to themselves, an end to compulsory overtime, improved staffing and changes to sick leave provisions.



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