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*- Anne Jamieson -*

**BC Forestry Workers Stand Up to Anti-Worker Offensive**

**Demonstrations Throughout BC Against Job Losses**



Demonstrations are occurring in many towns and cities throughout the province, protesting job losses and mill closures. The present downturn is one of the worst in the long history of recurring crises in the forestry sector.

The authorities attempt to explain why they have been unable to deal with the problem by citing a lack of available timber due to market forces, the end of the pine beetle harvest and forest fires. These explanations merely expose the impotence of those in charge. Nothing has been done to build a forest industry throughout BC that does not suffer from boom and bust cycles. Nor has anything been done to develop diverse local economies that do not depend on outside market forces.

The problem stems from lack of control of the working people living in the interior, coastal towns and Vancouver Island. A financial oligarchy has historically used the social wealth workers produce for its own narrow private interests rather than developing all-sided local economies. This issue has been amplified recently when those in control of the majority of mills used revenue to purchase and build mills in the U.S. and shut down production in BC.

*Who Decides?* and *Who Controls?* the regional economies are issues that must be addressed if the recurring problems are to be solved. The working people must gain control over their economy so they can solve problems in ways that favour them and their communities.

(Photos: PPWC, J. Beckett)

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## Forestry Truckers Organize Protest Convoy



A convoy of 230 logging trucks arrived in Vancouver on Wednesday afternoon, September 25, to protest the loss of forestry jobs and mill closures in the province. The convoy of semis started early Wednesday morning from Prince George, stopping in Quesnel, Princeton, and other towns to pick up additional forestry workers and truckers. Truckers from the Cariboo also joined the protest saying, "We're all getting hit hard."

The trucks with flags flying and hand-painted banners stopped briefly in Hope at the eastern end of the Fraser Valley before continuing their journey. On every bridge across the Trans-Canada highway people greeted the convoy with flags, banners and shouts of encouragement.

The trucks reached Vancouver in the afternoon and headed for the Vancouver Convention Centre. They circled around the downtown area for several hours, honking horns and saluting pedestrians. Hundreds of people gathered at the Convention Centre to greet the convoy with signs saying *logs = jobs, forestry feeds my family* and others.

The convoy members and their supporters expressed disappointment with the recurring crises and paralysis in the forestry sector, which the authorities appear powerless to change. Two immediate demands are for a change in stumpage rates for logs harvested from Crown land to better reflect the actual price of production and market conditions, and to reinstate the previous arrangement that tied timber in a given region to specific sawmills.



**Vancouver**



**Cache Creek**



**Merritt**

*(Photos: C. Langill, R. Pfyffer, J. Beckett)*

## Militant Rally in Campbell River Supports Demands of Striking Coastal Forestry Workers



Steelworkers on strike against Western Forest Products (WFP), members of United Steelworkers local 1-1937, rallied outside the offices of the company in Campbell River on September 26. The rally was called to reaffirm the determination of the workers to hold strong in their fight against concessions demanded by the company. The steelworkers were joined by workers from other unions including the International Longshore and Warehouse Workers, Hospital Employees' Union, BC Government and Service Employees' Union, the BC Teachers' Federation and others, including retired steelworkers.

Following a traditional greeting from two First Nations elders, the rally was addressed by USW Local 1-1937 president Brian Butler who said that Western Forest Products was "dead wrong" in their calculation that the workers were weak and that the union was weak when they came to the bargaining table with 24 concessions. He said that in spite of its slogan of "Defining Higher Standards" WFP was intent on defining lower standards for companies in BC and that since 2014 the company has embarked on an anti-union course. He cited, as examples, the drug and alcohol policy that is being used to target workers for termination and the



implementation of alternate shifts which puts workers in danger with long hours and cause serious disruption in family life. He said that it is the workers who create Western Forest Products' wealth but the reward for their hard work is increasing attacks on the workers and their union. Recently WFP closed a planer mill at the same time as it purchased mills in the U.S. where BC logs are being shipped. In response to all the efforts of the company to impose its dictate and wipe out over 40 years of gains workers have made, Butler re-stated that accepting concessions is out of the question.

Fraser Valley Steelworkers' local 2009 President Al Biekse, USW Wood Council Chairperson Jeff Bromley, BC Federation of Labour President Laird Cronk, USW District 3 Director Steve Hunt, North Island-Powell River MP Rachel Blaney and Ben Olsson, Secretary of the Campbell River, Courtenay and District Labour Council spoke in support of the Steelworkers' stand. Biekse denounced the forestry monopolies that are refusing to invest in the industry because they disagree with any new government policy that interferes with their dictate. All the speakers expressed their support for the stand of the coastal forestry workers and the significance to all the workers of BC of their fight against all attempts to smash their organization and take away hard won working

conditions. Further picket line support actions will be taking place at locations throughout Vancouver Island.

*(Photos: M. Duhra, B Harlow)*

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## Practice of Robbing Peter to Pay Paul Underscores Need for Democratic Renewal

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In response to the BC forestry crisis, the NDP government announced \$69 million in funding for job retraining and relief. The funds for this program come partially from the existing Rural Dividend Fund, which has been suspended. The Rural Dividend was a \$25 million promise to smaller and medium-sized towns and cities in BC to "strengthen and diversify their local economies." Eligible projects ranged from skills training to infrastructure to strategic planning. The BC government website states that the Rural Dividend program is "suspended until further notice in order to support workers and communities in the Interior."

Mayor Walt Cobb of Williams Lake denounced the proposal saying, "They're robbing Peter to pay Paul." He expressed the disappointment of those in the city who had applied for a \$500,000 rural dividend grant to build a water treatment plant. Cobb said the money Williams Lake is eligible for through the new forestry program pales in comparison to what would have been available from the rural dividend.

The situation underlines the fact that the cartel parties once in power function as managers for the financial oligarchy. Within that framework, they allocate public funds at their discretion. "Robbing Peter to pay Paul," as happened in the case in BC occurs also when cartel party governments cut social programs and public services to channel funds to big corporations in pay the rich schemes.

Democratic renewal is the order of the day. Canada needs a modern constitution that guarantees the rights of all, vests decision-making power in the people, not the rich, and establishes equality in nation to nation relations with Quebec and the Indigenous peoples.

With democratic renewal, an empowered people can speak for themselves on how the problems pose themselves. They can discuss, propose and decide solutions for the problems the people, economy and society face, form the government to enact the solutions, and have the power to hold their government to account.

*(With files from TML correspondents, CBC News, BC Government website)*



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