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The Need to Change the Direction of the Economy

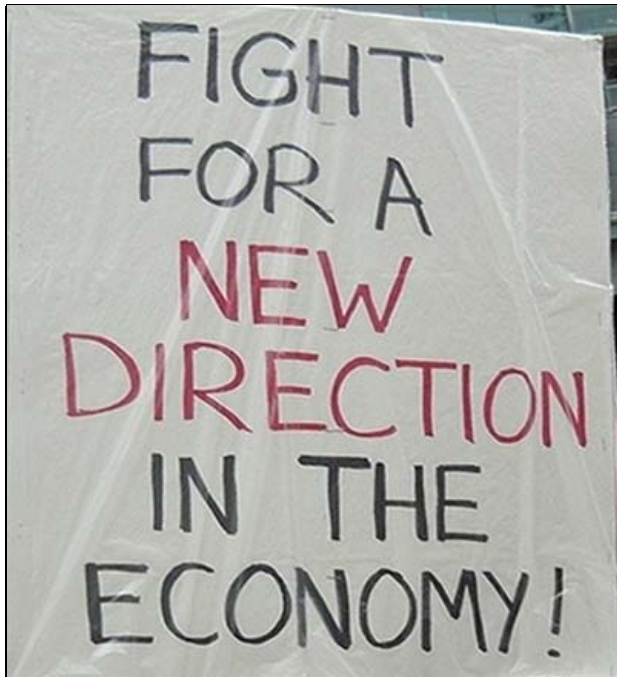
Criminal Disregard for the People and Economy

Working people depend on the economy for their livelihoods and life itself. The economy's health and vigour is of primary importance to them. When the economy or a sector loses its vitality and goes into crisis, the working people are those who suffer the most and pay the price with unemployment and worse. For the people to hear that those in control of the economy are deliberately sabotaging its health, outrage is entirely justified and calls to hold them to account and for a new direction for the economy are entirely right and proper.

Working people in the BC forestry sector are enraged to learn that while they are being laid off by the thousands, those in control of the five largest companies in the sector are buying mills and expanding their operations in the United States.

To rub salt in the wounds of losing their jobs, seeing their mills shut down and forest harvesting

operations curtailed, workers for Teal Jones learned that those in control of the company, which operates eight mills in BC, have used the social wealth workers produce in BC to purchase and expand two mills in the United States.



Teal Jones Group executives made two separate announcements in September of layoffs in BC and subsequently the purchase of two mills in Virginia. The company laid off 300 logging contractors on Vancouver Island and the Fraser Valley, and said another 500 workers at the company's two lumber, shake and shingle mills in Surrey would soon lose their jobs as timber supplies run out.

Two weeks after announcing the curtailment of production and layoffs, Teal Jones Group President and CEO Dick Jones boasted of using company funds to purchase and expand two Virginia sawmills creating 126 new jobs in that state. The company also agreed to source \$100 million worth of Virginia timber over the next four years. The Governor of Virginia, in praising the investment, announced in return several pay-

the-rich schemes for Teal Jones including an unspecified total of public money to come from the Commonwealth's Opportunity Fund, the Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund, the Port of Virginia's Economic and Infrastructure Development Zone grant program and the state's Enterprise Zone program, plus tax exemptions on the purchase of manufacturing equipment.

Forestry workers are confronted with their lack of control over their industry and lives. Private interests control the forest industry and do what they want with the social wealth that workers produce, and governments refuse to hold them to account. In a public statement many consider impotent, the NDP BC Premier John Horgan expressed frustration "with the five major CEOs of forest companies in BC" saying, "It is hard for me to listen to companies say they're in distress when they're making multimillion-dollar investments in the U.S. and Europe, and around the world."

Workers refuse to accept this criminal disregard for their lives and the economy. A new direction is necessary that sets the extended reproduction and strengthening of the economy as central to its operation. For this to occur, those in control must direct the reinvestment of the social wealth workers produce in a socially responsible manner to build a diverse economy that has an internal self-reliant strength and trades with others for mutual benefit and development. Such an economy must have the aim to guarantee the rights and well-being of all, and humanize the social and natural environment.

The organized working people must hold to account all those in positions of authority who violate the aim and guiding principles of a modern socialized economy where the actual producers must have the decisive say and control. Private ownership cannot be used as an excuse to violate these principles, direction and aim of a modern economy. The working class must not and will not tolerate the present criminality of those in control of the BC forest industry and the refusal of governments to defend the people, including the silence of the cartel parties on this crisis during the federal

election.

Discussion on the Future of Forestry and Our Forests

- Dawn Hemingway -



Enough is Enough was the banner headline on the poster advertising a meeting on the future of forestry, forest renewal and community well-being, organized by Conservation North, and held in Prince George on October 10. Those working in the forestry and environmental sectors, students hoping to obtain education and work in those areas, retirees from the sector, along with a wide range of concerned community members and activists, all came together to hear presentations and engage in discussion about this critical topic for the future of Prince George, northern BC and the entire province.

The first speaker of the evening was Stand Up for the North spokesperson, Peter Ewart, who highlighted the fact that we have "a talented and skilled workforce ... as well as supportive communities and institutes of higher learning." He continued by saying that the forests in BC can be brought back to health through appropriate policies and scientific practices, but that there is a longstanding roadblock. "Workers, Indigenous peoples, foresters, contractors, scientists and others who work in the field are alienated from having control or even having a say.... Instead, billionaire financiers and top government bureaucrats make the key decisions, too often at the expense of the workforce and communities...." Further, workers and communities are alienated from the forest itself "living and working in the midst of the forests yet having no say about the health of the forests and the environment as a whole." He concluded by calling for a new direction where working people and communities have more say and more control regarding the forests and forest industry of the province.

James Steidle, known for his leadership role in Stop the Spray BC (organizing to bring attention to and stop indiscriminate glyphosate spraying on forests in the BC interior), spoke next. He grew up and worked in a small forestry community, was subsequently employed in public policy and research within government and the labour movement, and now operates a woodworking company near Prince George. James' presentation spoke about the rise of supermills, the damaging and totally unacceptable practices of clearcutting and overharvesting massive stands of forests, simply to line

the pockets of the large forest companies, and the huge impact of these practices on small forestry operations, communities and families across northern BC. He also called for more control of the forests by those who work and live in the forests and forest communities.

The final speaker was Michelle Connolly from Conservation North who began by drawing attention to current efforts by big forest companies to gain access to public lands, including logging provincial parks as part of increasing their fiber supply. Specifically, she noted company requests of government to be provided "incentives" to access difficult terrain along with the creation of "working forest zones" with no conservation regulations. Michelle underlined the need to innovate and do better with the second growth forests that are already being harvested and leave the remaining primary, old growth forests alone. Again echoing the need for engagement and organizing to have community voices heard, Michelle reminded everyone of the current provincial government consultation process on forestry and encouraged attendees to access computers provided at the meeting to submit their views to government as one mechanism to express views and impact change.



Presentations were followed by questions and a lively discussion about how to organize to bring about the changes that everyone is seeking. Many participants also took advantage of the computers provided to send messages through to the government consultation process.

(Photo: Conservation North, J. Beckett)

The Need for Community Control of Our Forests

- Peter Ewart -

As is well known, the state of the forest industry and the forests themselves in British Columbia has deteriorated in the last twenty years, a culmination of longstanding bad policies and practices. Big corporations have shut down dozens of mills devastating workers and communities across the province. And there are many other problems.

The forests are unhealthy, plagued by insect infestations, decimation of old growth trees, poor planting practices, environmental deregulation, and so on.

Tremendous productive forces are being squandered and destroyed. However, despite these serious problems, forestry in BC still has great potential. There is a talented and skilled workforce with many decades of experience, as well as supportive communities and institutes of higher learning. In addition, the productive forests of BC can be brought back to health through appropriate policies and scientific practices. The modern world needs renewable BC wood, not only for lumber, but also for the thousands of potential by-products and uses.

However, there is a longstanding roadblock. The workers, Indigenous peoples, foresters, contractors, scientists, and others who work in the field are alienated from having control or even having a say over the productive forces and what happens in the industry. Instead, billionaire financiers and top government bureaucrats make the key decisions, too often at the expense of the workforce and communities.

To give an example, major Canfor shareholder and billionaire Jim Pattison has recently announced that he aims to take the company private and invest more in operations in the U.S. rather than Canada where Canfor was established. This, of course, is happening at a time when Canfor is closing or curtailing mills across British Columbia. Pattison neither founded nor built Canfor but rather is a global financier who, along with other financiers, took the company over some years ago and, since then, has reaped huge revenue from the workforce and the forests of the province.

But who actually built the company? In reality, it has been the tens of thousands of workers, contractors, and other forestry personnel who have run its diverse operations and whose labour acting on nature has created huge added value for corporate and government coffers over many years. In addition, communities in the province have provided infrastructure and services; universities and colleges have trained foresters and scientists; governments have provided all sorts of handouts, as well as access to the rich forest resource through the granting of lucrative timber rights.



Yet, despite of all this, billionaire financier Pattison gets to make major decisions that nullify this tremendous contribution and everyone else gets no say. How can it be that the revenue and profit generated from British Columbian communities is being ripped away and invested in other countries rather than being reinvested here to diversify and secure all-sided local economies?

As Mackenzie Mayor Joan Atkinson has put it, "for one individual to have that much control ... I'm not sure how that's going to play out ... Trees belong to the people of the province"[1]

To add insult to injury, after Canfor closed mills and curtailed operations across the Interior, Pattison chided the BC government for not doing enough to help the communities affected.[2]

The workforce and communities are not only alienated from having any kind of control over the forest industry, but they are also alienated from the forest resource itself. Workers work in the forests and mills, communities are surrounded by vast forests, and community members engage in recreation and other activities in the bush, yet we have little or no say about the health of the forests, wildlife and the environment as a whole. It is an unnatural situation. These communities should have the closest symbiotic relation with their forests. But under current arrangements, they cannot.

This double alienation from the forest industry and the forest resource itself is at the heart of the

problems we face today.

How can this alienation be overcome? There is a deep, longstanding desire by Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to have more say and more control over the forest industry and the forests themselves.



Indeed, this is the direction we, as a province, need to embark on. Community control of our forests is the order of the day. The community forest concept has been a step in that direction. However, the types of community control needed are much broader and more extensive than that. Communities, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, must be in control of the forests in their regions, including timber rights. And working people must have a say in what happens to the productive forces in the forest industry.

Yes, there remains an important role for the province in environmental and other types of regulation. But control over the forests must shift from the near powerless state of communities today to one in which communities play the major role in decisions about forest planning and management, and can address their specific situations.

Furthermore, we also need legislation that requires more reinvestment by corporations in local operations and communities and which enshrines rights for workers when these corporations decide to close operations or make other plans regarding the productive forces.

To accomplish these objectives, we need a new direction for forestry and new forms and mechanisms of democratic community governance. There are various models in the world today and others that could be developed. Let's take the opportunity to discuss this new direction, end this double alienation, build thriving communities and healthy forests, and get more value out of the wood.

Notes

1. "Jim Pattison's bid to control Canfor draws mixed feelings in BC's struggling forest towns," Andrew Kurjata, CBC News, August 12, 2019.
2. "Pattison urges BC to do more for mill towns hit by forestry slump," Brent Jang, *Globe and Mail*, September 29, 2019.

Workers Speak Out About Their Concerns

The Right of Workers in the Mining Sector and All Others to Healthy and Safe Working Conditions

- Interview with André Racicot, Abitibi Mine Worker and President of Quebec United Steelworkers Local 9291 -

As a worker, my main concern right now is health and safety in the mines. There have been a lot of

mine shaft collapses recently and situations that worry many mineworkers with regard to work site control. There is also concern about what is going on in the Labour Standards, Pay Equity, and Workplace Health and Safety Board (CNESST) inspection service. In order to separate politics from workplace health and safety, we have demanded the Board establish an ombudsman.

Certain policies emanating from the Board's central leadership undermine the work of mining inspectors. For example, the regulations for onsite interventions are not necessarily applied. Upon further investigation we have found that politics is interfering in the decisions of inspectors. Increasingly, the recommendations made by inspectors in accident investigation cases are being subjected to control -- those who exercise control may decide to remove certain aspects that run counter to what the Board's central leadership wants. Inspectors have told me that some of what they write in the reports is being withdrawn. We are not going to let that pass. We are going to exert pressure. We are going to persist in demanding that the CNESST's inspection service be provided with an ombudsman. We want inspections independent of, not subject to, political pressure.



We approached the CNESST management through its Board of Directors because we have representatives on the Board, but we were basically ignored. Although we did intervene on a number of occasions, nothing much has changed. We began meeting with people close to the Ministry of Labour so that action would be taken. This whole situation is a huge concern to the workers.

The Quebec United Steelworkers passed a resolution on this matter at our annual meeting in November 2018. The resolution was adopted by all activists present, over 500 people.^[1]

Accident prevention is the big loser in all this. If the inspection service is prevented from issuing recommendations or correction notices, the reality is that prevention is being thrown out the window. Without prevention, we cannot eliminate the risk of accidents.

The inspection service is responsible for enforcing laws and regulations. Despite the fact that that is the duty of inspectors, even though I cannot swear to it because I am not part of the Board's higher echelons, I believe the inspectors are limited in their actions. They should have freedom to act and freedom of choice and be able to sanction employers at fault.

Prevention is important because there are so many deaths, over 200 work-related deaths in Quebec per year. Those people are no longer here to speak. We are still here. It is our duty to push this intervention with the Board so that prevention, real prevention, is taken up. Workers have the right to work under safe conditions.

We often hear that "it is the worker's fault." I have often carried out accident investigations, and I know that in 85 per cent of cases, work organization is responsible for accidents. It has been proven.

All those involved in training are unanimous on this. They say that 85 per cent of accidents are related to work organization, planning, and structure. Are risk analyses performed? Is safety part of planning or is it all just about productivity? Increasingly, we are pushed to go faster, to be more productive. Is it done at the expense of safety? That is the question we must all ask ourselves.

I believe that prevention will always have its place. Accidents can be prevented. We definitely undertake investigations to find solutions, but it is a reactive measure. What we want is a proactive preventive measure. We must be able to find solutions before an accident occurs. We keep insisting that we want an ombudsman, so that the inspection service is freed from the claws of the legal service, the claws of politics. Clearly the political will to change the situation must be there.

All workers, whether unionized or not, must speak with one voice in saying that we want to work in a safe environment. For that to happen, employers must cooperate with us in finding solutions so that accidents do not happen. Inspectors must be able to do their work without any impediments or limitations imposed on them.

In 2019, at the dawn of 2020, it is unacceptable that in Quebec there are 200 work-related deaths per year.

Note

1. At their Annual General Meeting held November 21-23, 2018, Quebec United Steelworkers unanimously adopted a resolution regarding the CNESST inspection service. After a series of examples that highlight interventions by CNEEST management to impede freedom of action by inspectors, the resolution reads as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Quebec United Steelworkers, together with the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ), make representations to the Quebec Ministry of Labour to prevent any actions and political obstacles by CNESST management that interfere with the Inspection Service during accident investigations and the implementation of the regulations and statements of offence.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Quebec United Steelworkers, together with the FTQ, put pressure on CNESST to ensure that its Inspection Service is protected by an ombudsman to counter the interference of CNESST management so as to provide inspectors with the necessary latitude to carry out their preventive work.

The Need to Recognize that Regions Such as Ours Make a Fundamental Contribution to the Economic and Social Development of Quebec

**- Serge St-Pierre, President, CSN Central Council,
Gaspésie and Îles-de-la-Madeleine -**

Our main concerns at the moment are the transportation issues we face along with the working conditions of Gaspésie and Îles-de-la-Madeleine workers. For example, exorbitant airfare prices along with unsuitable schedules do not meet the needs of those requiring that type of transportation.

We are also demanding better train accessibility. The train does not travel to New Richmond in Baie-des-Chaleurs or to Port Daniel or Gaspé via Chandler.

Transportation is essential not only for a region's economic development but more importantly for its social development. This is crucial for us. We need to have a discussion on this, to bring together the entire Gaspésie population, all those involved in civil society who have a stake in it, so that pressure is placed on the government to improve transportation. It is essential for people to be able to move around, for the region's products to be made available outside our area, as well as have goods from the outside brought in. Trains are important, as they reduce pollution created by trucks.

Just as important for us in the development of the territory is to have what is called a decent annual income. What I mean by that is to get rid of the black hole (of Employment Insurance), so that people do not end up 2 to 6 weeks a year without any income.

People must have enough income to meet their personal and family needs. A decent income should include work, working conditions and wages, and guaranteed income supplements for an individual or couple. This should also include employment insurance that meets the needs of our region, which is mainly dependent on tourism. Tourism means temporary, seasonal work. It is very important as tourism is the engine of economic life in the Gaspésie area, after government services and services to the population, such as grocery stores, etc.



We want to put pressure on governments to change laws and regulations governing employment insurance so that a seasonal worker can live decently. That is a primary mandate. At this time only a part of the population is able to make ends meet. These are workers who receive employment insurance benefits as soon as they stop working and continue receiving them until they are back at work. But that is not the case for everyone.

In Gaspésie, we also do not have decent annual wages. When people are working, they may not make enough money to live a normal life, pay rent, buy groceries, and have a little left for leisure. The notion of a decent annual income becomes very important under such conditions.

Our other concern is the shortage of labour. Businesses are closing because they cannot address customer needs or are cutting down on work hours. Workers find themselves without a job because of an overall labour shortage.

In sum, our main concerns are transportation, a decent annual income and everything else related to work in general. It is not because we live in a remote area that wages should be inferior to what they are in large centres.

I attended a meeting a while back on employment. An employer told me he found it appalling that he could not find people to work during the summer season and that students had refused his offers for a job. I asked him what he was looking for as training. He told me he was asking for at least two years of university in surveying. I asked him what wage he was paying. He told me \$15 an hour. I told him that was his problem because the same student will make much more in the city.

The main reason for the shortage in labour is working conditions. Young people leave the region to

go and study in the city and don't come back because they cannot find suitable jobs in Gaspésie and Îles-de-la-Madeleine, which meet their expectations. Since we have problems of a labour shortage, communications, accessibility and services, they are not interested in coming back. We are lacking in terms of government services and means of transportation, and transportation costs are exorbitant. It costs more to travel from Gaspé to Montreal than it does from Gaspésie to Cuba. None of this encourages people to come and live in the Gaspésie.

Given the situation, we have three main demands:

1. Better government services for the region, and existing government service jobs must be preserved;
2. Improved and more accessible transportation. Not only is the high cost of transportation a drag on the local economy, it also hurts social development and prevents us from being able to bring and keep people here;
3. Adequate working conditions for workers, whether seasonal or full-time, which would allow them to live decently.



We intervene whenever we find it necessary. We intervene to remind our elected provincial and federal representatives that economic development is important for our workers and for the life of the region. Regions such as Bas-Saint-Laurent, Gaspésie and Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Côte-Nord, Abitibi, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, the so-called remote areas, are essential to the economic and social development of Quebec, something that governments forget.

More money is invested per capita in Montreal than in what are referred to as the remote regions. The mandate of the government, whether provincial or federal, is to distribute the wealth equitably; however that is not being done. When I hear the term "remote region," I find it a pejorative. These are integral parts of the country, parts of Quebec, yet they do not receive the same attention as the major centres.

Fifty-seven per cent of seasonal work is located in eastern Canada. Seasonal work makes a fundamental contribution to the development of the society and Quebec's economy. This must be recognized.

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