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Steelworkers Uphold the Dignity of Labour

Stand With Hamilton MANA Steelworkers!



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Tim Blackborow, MANA representative for Local 1005, gave a report on the May Day demonstration to Hamilton steelworkers' Thursday Meeting. He thanked everyone for expressing in person their solidarity with those holding the line at MANA and in addition walking the picket line on a regular basis.

U.S. Steel carved up Stelco, selling the bar and bloom mill to a German company Max Aicher North America in 2010. MANA began laying off workers in 2011 and when workers refused in 2013 to take a huge cut in pay and make other concessions in benefits, it locked them out. After that, the German imperialists unilaterally wound up their pension plan without consultation and began bringing in scabs to run the plant. MANA executives have committed these anti-worker actions without any public authority stopping them or holding them to account.



Local 1005 President Gary Howe in speaking to the media said MANA executives have refused to meet with the locked-out steelworkers since June 2013, when steelworkers voted against the company dictate for huge concessions in the contract. Gary said the need for unity of the working class has never been greater and called on everyone to carry on the fight and get the message out loud and clear that the workers do not accept this state of affairs.



Rolf Gerstenberger, former president of Local 1005, said the situation with the MANA steelworkers is another example of multinational corporations or governments dictating their demands rather than negotiating a settlement with unionized workers. Canada Post, Air Canada and other workers across Canada are facing a similar situation where companies and governments refuse to negotiate, Rolf said. Workers and their allies have to organize to face this reality of disequilibrium with courage, determination and actions with analysis.

The working class produces all the country's goods and services and demands a voice and say over what is produced, how it is produced and distributed, and workers' claim on what they produce. Those who own and control the social

property workers have produced should realize that this Canadian working class is not going to rest until its dignity is upheld and its rights are fully guaranteed.

The battle to uphold the dignity of MANA steelworkers in the face of the dictatorial demands and actions of the Max Aicher imperialists continues in the face of the brutal three-year lock-out. Those wanting to walk the picket line or in other ways involve themselves in this struggle should speak to Tim Blackborow to organize their participation. Contact Tim through the Local 1005 office: Phone - (905)547-1417 or (905)547-6238 or write to info@uswa1005.ca.



Discussion on Recent CCAA Rulings

Local 1005's Thursday Meeting discussed the two CCAA rulings from April 29

On Justice Wilton-Siegel's decision not to allow the union lawyers to see the secret deal between USS and the federal government, Rolf Gerstenberger said the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA) legislation lets judges decide whatever they want. The judge could have just as easily allowed this particular motion to see the secret decision if he wanted to because arbitrariness rules. Local 1005 has long experience with CCAA beginning with the Wild West of Justice Farley. Basically it is a money pit for lawyers where they go round and round until a decision is made that favours these or those powerful private interests who dominate the process.

Workers and retirees have to redouble their efforts to go to the court of public opinion and generate an organized storm of opposition to monopoly dictate and right, and demand redress for all these anti-social actions such as the wrecking of Stelco and the local economy, the elimination of pension indexing, the refusal both to pay municipal taxes and pay back the Ontario government \$150 million loan, and the continuing threat to Stelco's pension plans. Nation-building and a just cause will win in the end if the working class organizes to defend its rights with the same energy, determination, consciousness and scientific precision that it shows in industrial production.



The other court decision from April 29 allows U.S. Steel subsidiary USSC to stay under CCAA until July 28 despite objections from the Pittsburgh-based parent company. Apparently, USS wants to speed up the process to reach a settlement, whatever that may be. In its objection motion and in court, USS talked a lot about liquidation. Rolf said this is probably a scare tactic to force the other parties, including the Ontario government, to quickly settle on a buyer or else USS would push to liquidate USSC and go after all the assets.

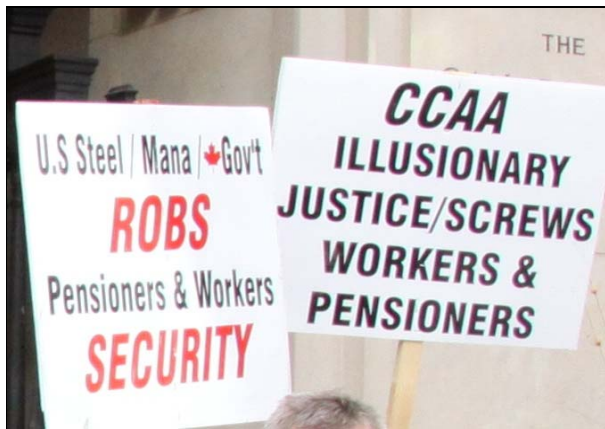
Rolf read a quote from the USS motion for an early conclusion to CCAA: "USS is very concerned about USSC's continuing losses... and the impact of these losses on USSC's liquidation value." Rolf remarked that USS, in a very self-serving manner, did not mention that it took away USSC's best customers or the other wrecking it has carried out that has put the former Stelco in this position of "continuing losses."

A steelworker who attended the April 29 court hearing on extending the stay in CCAA said he thought USS was up to something suspicious and workers and retirees should be vigilant. The lawyers for USS waited until the last minute to submit their objection to an extension and during the hearing talked a lot about liquidation.



The CCAA Money Pit

The Local 1005 Thursday Meeting on May 5 discussed the role of legal firms in the Nortel bankruptcy and other CCAA proceedings. Rolf Gerstenberger said a recent report put legal fees alone paid out in the 7-year battle over Nortel's assets at more than \$2.5 billion. The report features Mike Barrick who is representing British pensioners in the case. Barrick is also USS's lawyer who is fighting against Local 1005 pensioners. Rolf said these lawyers and their firms go from one CCAA case to another, switching sides with apparent ease. He said the current financial advisory group for Local 1005 is of the same nature, acting against workers in one case and for them in the next. All this is part of a broken system that goes against the public interest. CCAA has nothing to do with nation-building and finding solutions to problems in the economy or a particular sector or company. It has become a big weapon in the hands of the financial oligarchy to steal workers' pensions, benefits, and social property, assets and wealth that should go towards nation-building.



The growth in the use and importance of the CCAA is an aspect of the anti-social offensive and neo-liberal nation-wrecking and attack on a government of laws and workers' rights, collective agreements and pensions that began in the mid-1980s and accelerated with free trade and the Martin Liberals, Harper Conservatives and now with the Trudeau Liberals.

Coming out of CCAA in 2006 and with the subsequent sale of Stelco to U.S. Steel, some people thought that the situation would be better

than if Stelco continued in the hands of hedge funds such as Brookfield Capital. Local 1005 pointed out at the time that all these big companies whether hedge funds or ostensibly industrial companies are part of the financial oligarchy. They all behave in a similar manner, which is in their narrow private interests to take as much of the social wealth workers produce as possible and do whatever they feel is necessary to serve their empire-building regardless of how this affects the people and the public interest. The main owner of U.S. Steel is JPMorgan Chase one of the most dominant institutions of the global financial oligarchy. The company is based in New York and classified as the largest bank in the United States and sixth largest in the world.

Rolf said workers should be equally vigilant with any potential buyers for Stelco this time around because they are all out for their empires and big scores no matter what they call themselves or how they characterize their intentions. Local 1005 has experience with both hedge funds and so-called steel or industrial companies. No matter how members of the new ownership group describe themselves, they come out of the same pool of social wealth that makes up the financial oligarchy with the same aim for empire-building as U.S. Steel or Brookfield Capital. When the German imperialist company MANA purchased the Stelco bar and bloom mill it made all kinds of promises and took public money for what it said was a great project. The MANA project soon turned sour and steelworkers came under a broad assault on their rights that continues to this day.

This is what workers and retirees are up against, he said. Workers have to strengthen their

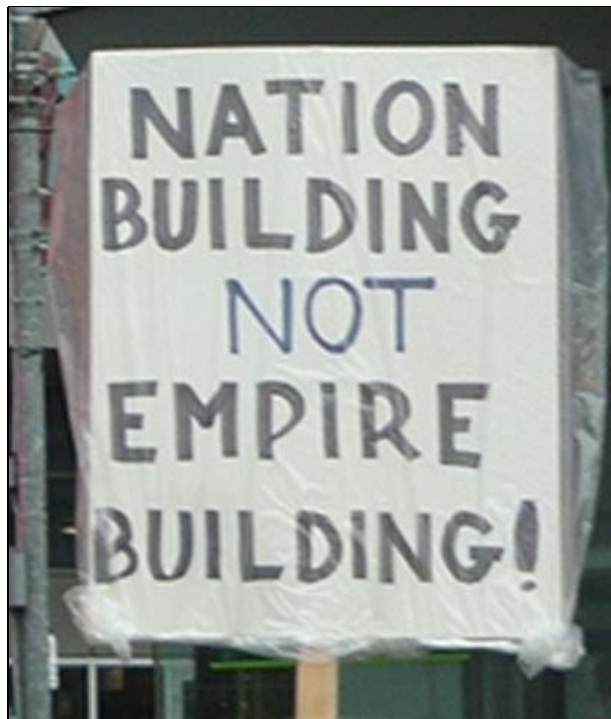
organized opposition movement so that it has the power to defend their rights and nation-building and solve economic and other problems in the country in the public interest. In so doing they will deprive the imperialists and their governments of their power to attack the people and their rights.



Defending Public Right in the Supranational State

How can workers defend their rights within the neo-liberal anti-social system that has come into being over the last few decades? Free trade and the power of global monopolies such as U.S. Steel are a lethal combination. The monopolies act with impunity within supranational states such as the United States of North American Monopolies, which includes Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, and its free trade regime of NAFTA and other global arrangements. Europe is now dominated by the supranational state of the European Union. The supranational states make the rights and narrow private interests of corporations supreme. Their monopoly right dominates and suppresses public right and the rights of all including workers' rights.

Within the supranational state, sovereign laws on the environment, labour laws and standards of corporate behaviour etc. are not allowed to infringe on the claims of corporations for profit from the social wealth workers produce. In this situation, Parliament and the provincial legislatures play an anti-social role. On their banner is inscribed the motto: Make monopolies competitive and build global empires. They enact laws to enable monopolies to infringe on public right and workers' rights, such as the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA), which they use to attack workers rights and their just claim on the social wealth they produce.



Parliament, the Quebec National Assembly and provincial legislatures hand over public money to the monopolies and give them limitless concessions on what they can do. Monopolies within the supranational state have created a situation where governments cannot act in the public interest even if they wanted to. They are caught in the web of free trade and other agreements negating a government of laws and legal agreements such as collective contracts between employers and employees.

The system has to change. Canadians have to put a stop to this empire-building and attacks on rights and nation-building. Those who decide important issues such as judges under CCAA are not the peers of the people affected. The same is true for issues such as Employment Insurance where those affected have no say while the Trudeaus from the ruling elite make arbitrary decisions saying oil workers from this area can receive extended EI but workers living in Edmonton cannot.

When all the workers in Fort McMurray and elsewhere worked together in the oil fields they were

treated according to their union contracts wherever they worked. When the slump in the oil sector hit and many were laid off, they went home all over the country to the Maritimes to Edmonton and Calgary and now they are being treated differently according to where they apply for EI and now live. This is totally wrong and unacceptable.

Justice Wilton-Siegel and the justices in other CCAA cases such as Nortel are not workers' peers. Trudeau is not a peer of workers. Why are they making decisions that greatly affect workers and retirees' lives? Those in the ruling elite are not affected negatively by the decisions they make. They should not be allowed to make the decisions.

On the question of EI, Local 1005 and others in the working class movement have long said that if workers are laid off they should receive benefits until they are back to work. They should not be forced to fend for themselves. Canadians live in a completely socialized economy. Workers sell their capacity to work for a lifetime guarantee of claims on the social wealth the working class produces collectively. If the economy cannot find employment for laid off workers, that is not the fault of the working class; it is a problem in the economy and with those who control the economy and they are duty-bound to support the working class at all times.

The modern economy is based on a relationship with the working class. Workers depend on the economy for work and their security and well-being throughout their lives, and the economy depends on workers to work, to sell to employers their capacity to work.

The social relationship between workers and the economy cannot be one-sided. The economy cannot depend on workers to work when needed but then turn around and not support workers when they are not needed or when they are injured, sick or retired. This is not acceptable and never will be acceptable in a modern economy.

This is something the working class has to think about deeply. What kind of organization of the working class and movement is required to bring equilibrium to the relationship between the actual producers in society, the working class, and the economy? How do workers and their peers become decision-makers in practice; how do they exercise some control over those issues that affect them, their peers, their workplaces, their communities and country?

Workers have the social responsibility to themselves and their nation to organize themselves to become the decision-makers in the country. The Trudeaus, CCAA justices and others of the ruling imperialist elite are going to continue to make decisions that affect workers negatively for as long as they are allowed to do so. The organized Workers' Opposition has the social responsibility to deprive the ruling imperialist elite of the power to make decisions that should be made by the people and their peers who are affected by those decisions.

(For further discussion on the supranational state see *Postnational and Supranational State -- Where Does Jurisdiction Lie?*)



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