

March 15, 2018

**ABI Liquidates Mediated Bargaining Session
with Locked-Out Workers**

**No Room for Provocations and
a Hidden Agenda!**



Locked out workers rally at Quebec National Assembly, February 8, 2018, demanding Aluminerie de Bécancour negotiate a settlement

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ABI Liquidates Mediated Bargaining Session with Locked-Out Workers No Room for Provocations and a Hidden Agenda!



Rally at Quebec National Assembly, February 8, 2018.

On March 8, nearly two months after the start of the lockout at the Aluminerie de Bécancour Inc. (ABI), the first bargaining session between United Steelworkers Local 9700 and company representatives lasted only a few minutes. In a blatant provocation, ABI walked out of the talks refusing to engage in bargaining in good faith even in the presence of a mediator.

A month earlier, the Quebec Minister of Labour, in separate meetings with the union and company, suggested that negotiations could begin with the assistance of a government appointed mediator-conciliator. The union immediately agreed but ABI remained silent until just before it abruptly liquidated the March 8 meeting, grossly provoking and insulting the locked-out workers.

According to USW Local 9700, the ABI bargaining committee came to the table and immediately announced that it had no mandate to negotiate anything and removed its previous "final offer" from the table. Workers had rejected that offer on January 10, while acknowledging elements in the offer could be used to negotiate an agreement that would be acceptable to the workers.

Local union President Clément Masse described the company's continuing refusal to negotiate as vengeful and unproductive. Masse said, "This is a slap in the face to each and every worker. After forcing us onto the street for two months, they are now telling us that what they previously offered will not even be used as a basis to seek a settlement.



USW Local 9700 bargaining committee speaks after ABI walked out of the negotiating session.

"They claim to want to hear suggestions from us, but we're operating in a vacuum. It's unfortunate that representatives of this employer don't have the decency to commit to a reasonable basic standard expected in collective bargaining."

Masse added that the union negotiators entered into the mediated bargaining session on March 8 confirming their willingness to engage in meaningful discussions over the key stumbling blocks -- pensions and seniority issues.

"Today we felt there was no desire from the employer to negotiate in any meaningful way. They indicated vindictiveness for the workers' rejection of their previous contract offer. It's the same reaction we've had from them since they locked us out. They're losing money due to their decision and they're trying to shift the blame onto us," Masse said. "When the time comes that they are prepared to meaningfully discuss resolutions to the outstanding issues, we'll be pleased to work with them in a productive way. Until then, the workers are standing together, morale is good," he added.

The company's continuing provocative behaviour convinces workers that the owners of ABI, the Alcoa and Rio Tinto monopolies, have a hidden agenda. The global cartel seeks to impose its unspoken agenda at the expense of the living and working conditions of the workers, the many elements within the local economy that depend on ABI's activities, and the entire surrounding population of Mauricie-Centre-du-Québec.



The global aluminum sector is embroiled in international intrigue amongst the big powers and cartels over control and prices. The Alcoa-Rio Tinto cartel is seeking to strengthen its control, force higher prices for finished aluminum and depress the claims of workers who produce the finished product and those who supply means of production especially electricity and infrastructure.

The lockout at ABI, which is only one aluminum plant among many that the global cartel controls, immediately reduces supply thus putting upward pressure on the market price. The lockout is meant to force concessions from workers and the Quebec government to depress the value that workers claim from the aluminum they produce, the price of hydroelectricity from Hydro-Quebec and inputs from local suppliers.

The cartel's hidden agenda including its provocative refusal to bargain represents a showdown with

the workers, the local community and the Quebec people and their society. Opposition to this dictate requires the conscious organized resistance of the workers and their allies so that a collective agreement acceptable to the workers is signed as soon as possible and the situation does not degenerate further.

Workers' Forum reiterates its full support for ABI workers and calls on workers in Quebec and Canada to provide them with all possible assistance. The global cartel's provocative actions in using an important productive force as a weapon to tighten its control over the direction of the Quebec and global economies are not just a matter for the workers and community directly involved. The cartel's actions are destructive to say the least and should not be allowed to pass. Everyone should stand as one in opposition to the Alcoa-Rio Tinto cartel and its hidden agenda to serve its narrow private interests at the expense of the people.



Members of USW Local 8922, representing security guards, join USW Local 9700 for solidarity rally outside the Bécancour plant, March 12, 2018. They pledge ongoing financial assistance to the locked-out workers.

For Your Information

The worldwide control of aluminum production by the global monopolies means that the lockout reducing production in Bécancour has already increased the commodity's market price. Reports indicate that Alcoa and Rio Tinto are serving their North American customers with now higher-priced aluminum their workers produce in Europe. This criminal activity persists because the smelter workers do not control their work, the smelter where they work and the social product they produce. They cannot bring their social responsibility and consciousness into play, which would ensure that a proper price of production is paid for electricity, rights at the workplace would be guaranteed, and the entire value smelter workers produce would go in a planned way towards strengthening the economy in their community and overall in Quebec and Canada, and to assist in humanizing the social and natural environment.

The private interests who control Alcoa and Rio Tinto are fixated on their own narrow interests in contradiction with the whole. They could care less that the lockout harms the interests of 1,030 workers and their community. They could care less that Hydro-Quebec does not receive the price of production for the electricity the imperialist oligarchs buy, forcing other sectors of the economy to make up the shortfall in value. The imperialists' obsession with their own narrow private interests is incompatible with the socialized economy in which their businesses operate. That is the root cause of "market failures," recurring economic crises and unresolved problems plaguing the economy and society. They are not concerned about the negative ramifications of stealing electricity from Hydro-

Quebec, of locking out workers and destroying their pension plans and ripping value out of the Quebec economy. They are wearing blinkers and do not want to see what they do not care about beyond their narrow private interests.



Reject ABI's Secret and Self-Serving Agenda and Hold the Global Cartel to Account

- Pierre Chénier -

A press release issued by ABI following its provocative liquidation of the March 8 government-mediated bargaining session reveals to some of Alcoa-Rio Tinto's hidden agenda.

ABI writes:

Representatives of the Bécancour Smelter (ABI) management met with USW Local 9700 today, informing them that the plant needs fundamental changes to achieve long-term success. The meeting took place in the presence of Mr. Jean Nolin, the conciliator appointed by the Ministry of Labor.



The constant objectives of ABI management during last year's long negotiations were to ensure the sustainability of the plant and to reach a negotiated agreement. However, the union's pressure tactics during these negotiations have caused a significant deterioration of the operating conditions in the plant, creating hazards for employees, putting the products at risk, threatening the supply of customers and negatively affecting the financial performance.

The union's rejection of a fair and competitive offer left ABI management with no choice but to take steps to protect its employees and the assets of the plant. Consequently, the rejected offer can no longer serve as a basis for a future settlement.

ABI is not as competitive as it should be and this situation needs to be improved to succeed in the long term.

As a result, ABI's operational structure needs to be re-evaluated with the goal of significantly improving productivity and workforce organization to ensure consistency for its customers.

The company's self-serving and deceptive diatribe against the workers suggests it withdrew its previous "final offer" for two reasons:

1. "The plant needs fundamental changes to achieve long-term success." The company must have the freedom to dictate these changes without workers having a say or any control over their direction regardless of the consequences.
2. The "union's pressure tactics during these negotiations have caused a significant deterioration of

the operating conditions in the plant" to the point the company was forced to lock out workers to "protect its employees and the assets of the plant" and now even withdraw its final offer. Considering that the negotiations and "union's pressure tactics" (which are allegations they do not even bother to describe) took place last year long before the March 8 meeting, it appears disingenuous at the very least to suggest the workers and their tactics are the reason the company has withdrawn its "rejected final offer" and refuses to negotiate a new contract.

The company considers negotiations in good faith to reach terms of employment that defend the rights of workers as "threatening" and something that should not happen, period. The global cartel wants complete control to do whatever it wants and to depress the claims of workers on the value they produce and the price of hydroelectricity the state enterprise supplies, otherwise the cartel threatens to destroy the plant.



ABI wants a complete restructuring of its operations on its own terms and dictate, and is treating the workers or at least the workers organized into a union as saboteurs of the production process. This is a strange and completely outmoded view of the modern reality. Workers are the producers of the wealth of ABI and have the right to negotiate and have a decisive word on their working conditions. The presence of cheap plentiful hydroelectricity was built through the sweat and blood of Quebec workers in which billions of dollars of value have been invested. The global cartel wants the living work-time of smelter workers on its own terms and the congealed value of electricity at below its price of production. This is not a modern or civilized arrangement.

The company uses the language of complete restructuring to criminalize any opposition coming from those who do the work. The characterization of the restructuring and the criminalization of workers who demand a say and their rights have nothing to do with negotiating a collective agreement. They are the words and actions of dictators who want to sabotage a civilized negotiation process. Such words, actions and distortion of negotiations to arrange terms of employment are most threatening for the workers, the community and Quebec, and completely unacceptable.

ABI's words border on the absurd and would be laughable if not dealing with such a serious situation. The same employees the company wants to protect are those that it has locked out. This reminds people of war propaganda such as when U.S. army officers during the Vietnam War said they had to destroy the village to save it. Who are the villains against whom ABI wants to protect its employees? Its own employees? Those who are united in the fight against the lockout and demand their rights should be upheld? The workers organized into a union? Does the cartel want to split the workers and pit workers against one another, or even replace them altogether?

In any case, this is not a sign of willingness to negotiate in good faith with the workers who produce the value that the aluminum giants covet. If the word "negotiations" is to mean anything at all, Alcoa-Rio Tinto must be held to account and brought to the bargaining table. The right of workers to a say in their working conditions and collective terms of employment must be upheld in all workplaces, regions and entire countries. They are not and should never be the playground or theatre

of war of the global private interests to serve their narrow aim of maximum money profit and domination.



Workers in Labrador and Quebec Defend Their Rights

Workers at Iron Ore Company of Canada Give Strike Mandate Against Anti-Worker Concessions



Workers picket outside Iron Ore Canada plant in Labrador City during 2015 fight against layoffs of maintenance workers at the plant.

Workers at the Iron Ore Company of Canada (IOC) in Labrador City voted on March 5 and 6, to give their negotiating committee a strike mandate to defeat the anti-worker concessions demanded by the company. Ninety per cent of the 1,300 workers, members of Local 5795 of the United Steelworkers, voted 99.6 per cent in favour of a strike mandate. The workers will hold further meetings on March 20 and 21 to discuss the negotiations. On March 23, they will be in a legal position to take an actual strike vote.

In Sept-Îles, Quebec, 301 fellow IOC workers, members of USW Local 9344, met on March 7 and 8, and gave their union committee a massive strike mandate of 99.2 per cent with a participation rate of 88.3 per cent. The Sept-Îles IOC workers are facing the same demands for concessions in their terms of employment.

Workers of the mining monopoly IOC generate enormous value in the economy by mining iron ore, transforming it into use-value in the form of pellets and concentrate, and transporting these products to facilities where other workers can transform them further into steel. The company expropriates the added-value, which workers produce, as money profit for its global owners. The concessions the monopoly demands are meant to increase its money profit, almost all of which is not reinvested in the local communities but is taken out along with the depleted natural resource. The concessions lessen the wages, benefits and pensions of workers both



now and into the future. Those claims on the value workers produce form the bulk of the value from production that stays in Labrador City and Sept-Îles.

Workers mine the iron ore in Labrador, which they then concentrate and pelletize and prepare for transport by rail the 418 kilometres to the port of Sept-Îles for shipping to steel plants worldwide. IOC is operated by Rio Tinto Ore Group and is a joint venture among Rio Tinto (58.7 per cent), Mitsubishi Corporation (26.2 per cent) and Labrador Iron Ore Royalty Income Corporation (15.1 per cent).



Interview, Dany Maltais, United Steelworkers Union Representative on the Quebec North Shore



Workers at Iron Ore Canada in Sept-Îles, Quebec give union strong strike mandate.

Workers' Forum: Workers at the Iron Ore Company of Canada in Labrador and Sept-Îles in Quebec recently gave strong strike mandates to their union executives against IOC's demands for anti-worker concessions. Can you tell us more?

Dany Maltais: The vote was decisive. We have 301 workers on our lists of active workers in Sept-Îles. In three separate meetings, 266 workers took part in the vote. This is a participation rate of 88 per cent. Of the 266 people present, only two people voted against the strike mandate. We are very happy with the result.

In the negotiations, there are common monetary issues negotiated at the same table for Sept-Îles and Labrador such as wages, pensions and insurance. Among the demands for concessions, two affect the pension plan. The first and most important one is that the employer is asking for new workers to be put on a defined contribution pension plan rather than the defined benefit plan we have right now. For us this is unacceptable. [A defined contribution plan] is much less advantageous for workers, in particular because the amount workers receive in retirement is not guaranteed. Also, to receive the defined benefit plan, workers made concessions on wages in the years 1990-2000.

It is inadmissible to try to introduce a disparity of treatment of workers regarding the pension plan,

to allow orphan clauses [*where new hires receive inferior wages and benefits to current workers -- WF note*]. We do not want to be the instigator of the impoverishment of the North Shore population in the next 20 to 30 years. We know that people have much less income in retirement, that they are less healthy and require more care. Lowering incomes for retired workers puts more of the tax burden on the citizens in general. There is a regional issue in this negotiation. We do not want new people to be impoverished. We are not a big community. We all know each other. The mining industry has raised the standard of living of the people of the North Shore, but if these workers start becoming impoverished, governments put the tax burden for their expenses on the community as a whole. We do not want to be the instigator of that.

Again with regard to the pension plan, IOC wants to impose a new rule on the age at which workers can retire. Right now, after 30 years of service, a worker can retire. The employer wants to impose new terms so that even with 30 years of service, a worker must have reached the age of 52 before retiring without penalty. This measure is organized to penalize young people, workers who often start at the age of 18 or 19 and who reach 30 years of service at 48 or 49 years old and will now have to work longer. Our economy is not very diversified and there are young people who take these jobs that pay well, like those at IOC, Alouette or Arcelor Mittal, when they are very young and then work there all their working life. Young people entering IOC will have to give the employer more years before they retire if the company is successful with this demand.

Then there is the demand for concessions on the issue of extended vacations, another thing the employer wants to impose on workers. Currently, as you accumulate seniority, you accumulate vacation days that you can take in addition to your annual vacation. The employer now wants workers to take these days in cash and forego the extra vacation. This is an unacceptable attack on the principle of seniority, and also with the concern for work-family balance these days, is a step backwards.

The fourth issue, which is a local one, deals with technological change. The further we go, the more we hear about automation of tasks. Two years ago, the employer started working out programs based on the automation of our tasks. At the moment, the rule is that workers affected by automation can take the jobs of workers with less seniority. Now the employer is telling us that there are tasks that we will not be able to do because the jobs take engineers and technicians and that we do not have the training to be able to work with the computers and so on. So the employer wants to give these tasks to supervisors and managers who will no longer be part of the bargaining unit. This means that progressively our union will be seriously weakened and at risk. We will not have the mass of workers needed to build a balance of power. In the long run, if this happens, it will not be unionized workers who will operate the railway. The employer tells us not to worry about it, that this is a long term issue, but we do not want to go through this collective bargaining without discussing the issue. We want a letter of understanding to be added to the collective agreement that says that the new tasks that will be created based on automation will have to be an integral part of the tasks that are performed by our members. The employer tells us that they do not accept this demand of ours.

WF: Would you like to say something in conclusion?

DM: The employer must withdraw these concessions. In this negotiation we are talking about the future. We are talking about young people and we are talking about the strength of our bargaining unit. We are taking up responsibility and the local must make sure that we have a prosperous future. I am proud of the work we do for the entire community.



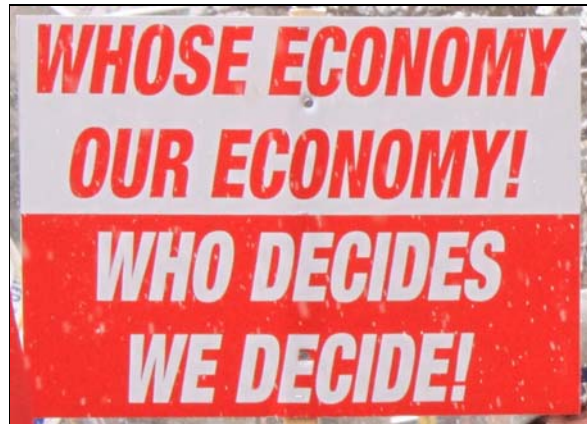
Nonsense About Tariffs and Trade and Real Wars

Is This Any Way to Manage an Economy?

- K.C. Adams -

Working people could do better than these constant crises and integration into the U.S. war economy

The Canadian steel and aluminum industries are in turmoil. They seem to be forever in chaos. Algoma Steel is almost always in *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA) bankruptcy protection. The Aluminerie de Bécancour Inc. (ABI) smelter in Quebec has locked out over one thousand workers for months demanding concessions from both workers and Hydro-Quebec, and to reduce supply to force higher prices for aluminum on the international market. Stelco steel plants in Hamilton and Nanticoke have only recently emerged from CCAA bankruptcy protection for the second time since 2006.



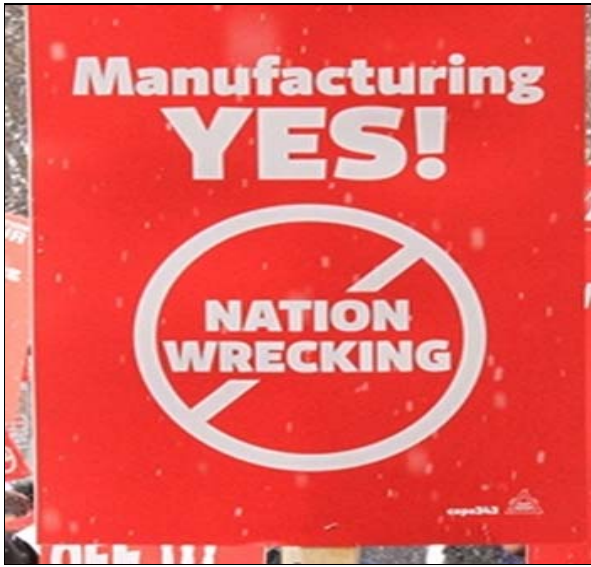
Having greatly reduced Stelco's production capacity and markets during the period of U.S. Steel control from 2007 to 2017, the new U.S. owners took control of the facilities last year after having the CCAA bankruptcy court allow them to ignore their social responsibility to Stelco retirees and the necessary environmental remediation of historical pollution. This new assault from foreign imperialists occurred after Stelco steelworkers and the steel community had suffered attack after attack under the control of U.S. Steel. In 2013, U.S. Steel sold off a Stelco mill in Hamilton to German global brigands calling themselves MANA, who seized control and almost immediately locked out all steelworkers, demanding monstrous concessions. The lockout continues to this day while members and supporters of USW Local 1005 pursue a battle for justice at MANA.

Nation-Building and Rights of the People Under Assault

Global monopolies dominate the steel and aluminum sectors, twisting and squeezing them to meet their narrow private interests. The steel sector in particular is plagued with fluctuating market prices widely disconnected both up and down from prices of production, causing continuous problems. The sectors do not serve an independent Canadian economy because that is not the aim; nor does such a conception even exist in the consciousness of the imperialists in control whose outlook is one of self-interest, as if society does not exist and the rights, claims and needs of the people are debilitating costs and a drain on their money profit.

No nation-building project for a Canadian economy not dominated by supranational cartels is currently being discussed in official circles of the ruling elite let alone struggling to emerge in practice. All the official politicians, economists and pundits say a Canadian economy under control by Canadians themselves is not possible in this world dominated by global empire-builders obsessed with expanding their own private interests as supranational cartels in opposition to nation-building and the right of the people to control those affairs that affect their lives. Yet here the people are faced with constant crises and a President down south who says, without any concern for humanity, that

trade wars and real wars are winnable and good.

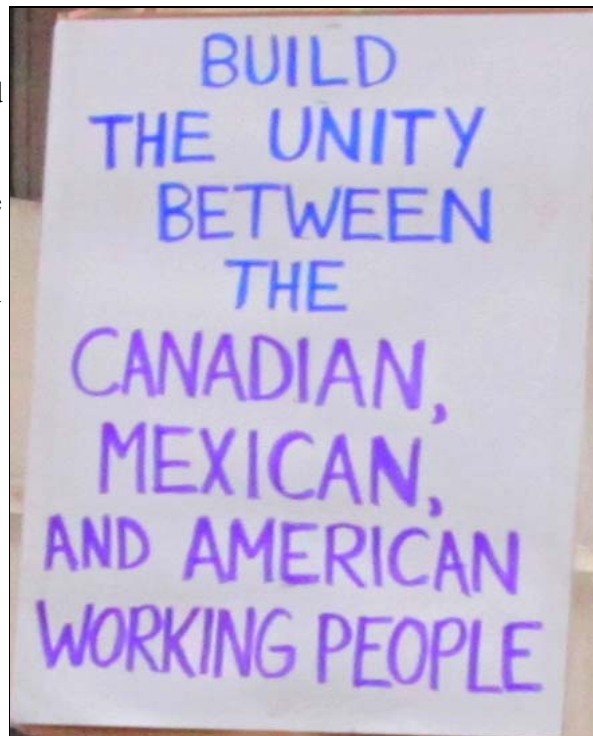


A disconnect appears between the real world Canadian working people face and some fanciful one that official politicians, experts and those in control concoct. The aluminum sector, entirely controlled by supranational empire-builders, has located in Canada because of cheap and plentiful electricity, which is by far the largest material input in the production process. So what is the problem with the market price of aluminum that moves President Trump to threaten a tariff? U.S. manufacturers, especially those in the war economy, want aluminum at the lowest price possible and Canadian aluminum suits that purpose because of cheap, plentiful and clean hydro-electricity and a skilled workforce and modern infrastructure.

If Trump wants aluminum at a higher price and U.S. manufacturers that use aluminum are on board with his proposal, which is highly doubtful, why not just say so and have the global owners arrange a higher market price than the fluctuating market price. The higher price could then go back to Hydro-Québec as full exchange for the electricity its workers produce. Some view it as ironic that the global rich who control Canada's aluminum sector are already trying to force higher prices by reducing supply with the lockout at ABI, so they obviously would be overjoyed with Trump's demand for higher prices as long as it flows back to them and not the U.S. state. Why does it have to descend into a global trade war? The entire mess appears inexplicable and irrational.

The problem with these and other basic economic sectors is that sensible working people in Canada, Mexico and the U.S., who want to live in peace and hold high a spirit of international trade for mutual benefit and development and oppose the war economy, are not in control of their workplaces, the broader economy or political affairs.

The threat of steel tariffs that Trump made and now has temporarily withdrawn is also bizarre in the sense that around \$5 billion worth of steel produced in Canada is shipped to the U.S. while Canada imports about \$7 billion worth of U.S.-made steel in recent years. With some adjustments in quality and types of steel this means almost all trade in steel between the U.S. and Canada at this point could be eliminated with each country producing for their own needs without any loss of production. Some opportunities for development could even arise as Canada and the U.S. are so broad east to west that production could be rationally developed in all the main regions of each country to make them self-reliant in steel and even broaden out into manufacturing of steel-based goods. The other most positive feature would be



to begin to extricate Canada from the U.S. war economy where both steel and aluminum are key.

Again the problem here is lack of control by working people. Canadian and neighbouring fellow workers down south face the dilemma that they are not in control of the steel or aluminum sectors, the broader economy and politics. The lack of control means they cannot bring to the fore in practice their social consciousness of the necessity to first have a diverse and self-reliant internal economy, and from a sovereign base under their control search and find peoples abroad who are willing to trade following modern principles of mutual benefit and development and are not bent on destructive trade wars and real wars requiring a war economy.

Canadians and friends in the U.S. face the task of bringing into being a new direction for the economy because the situation of gearing up for bigger and more devastating wars and crises is not good to say the least. Working people can do better because they begin neither from an aim of expropriating social wealth from the value their fellow workers produce nor do they speculate as those in power now do of waging "winnable" destructive trade and real wars to steal from others and destroy what they cannot control. The official anti-social talk saying trade and real wars targeting fellow working people are good and winnable and require a war economy puts everyone constantly on edge with their minds overwhelmed anticipating the next crisis and war.



The official politicians and other leaders in Canada are shameful in their response to Trump's bluster of first proposing tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum and then backing off if NAFTA talks go his way. Canadian officials all stressed the necessity to develop the joint North American war economy as essential in strengthening the war capacity of NATO and NORAD for which steel and aluminum are crucial.

Prime Minister Trudeau's Office on March 8 released a statement of Trudeau's phone conversation with Paul Ryan, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, which said in part:

"The United States is Canada's closest ally. Canada is a safe and secure supplier of steel and aluminum to the U.S., recognized under U.S. law as part of the U.S. defence industrial complex."

In a release about Trudeau's conversation with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, the PMO said in part:

As a close ally of the United States, Canada is a safe and secure supplier of steel and aluminum to the United States and is part of the United States National Technology and Industrial Base related to National Defence.

Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said on March 1, "As a key NORAD and NATO ally, and as the number one customer of American steel, Canada would view any trade restrictions on Canadian steel and aluminum as absolutely unacceptable.... Canada is a safe and secure supplier of steel and aluminum for U.S. defence and security. Canada is recognized in U.S. law as a part of the U.S. National Technology and Industrial Base related to national defence."

Later on March 8 following Canada's exemption from the global U.S. tariff on steel and aluminum

she said:

We are America's best friend and closest ally. Canada and the United States have the greatest economic partnership of any two countries in the world. We're staunch allies in NORAD, in NATO, and all along our 8,891 km peaceful and secure border.

The crisis is such that no official Canadian leader or mass media has objected to this warmongering talk and integration of the Canadian economy into the U.S. war economy. Canadian, Mexican and U.S. working people reject the official warmongering, anti-social view and outlook and are organizing to gain the power to deprive those currently in control of their power to destroy through crises and wars what humans have built.

In organizing and fighting for the new, working people and their political and defence organizations are developing the human factor and social consciousness that a modern economy must have a new aim that strives to develop the socialized economy in an all-sided manner without crises and war. A modern economy cannot be built on brutal competition and war but on cooperation where modern social relations ensure the interrelated sectors of the socialized productive forces perform in conformity with each other and their socialized nature for extended reproduction of the economy without war and crises so that it can meet the needs and claims of the actual producers and general interests of society.

A modern economy opposes trade wars, real wars and preparations for war. It strives to guarantee the well-being of all members of society and its general interests. A pro-social economy with such a sound internal foundation trades globally based on the principles of mutual benefit and development, consciously opposing all trade and real wars and preparations for war. This is not the case now where the Canadian economy is integrated into the U.S. war economy supplying both raw and semi-finished material while the U.S. economy produces most of the finished weapons of individual and mass destruction.

Working people with their modern social consciousness can take the economy in a new pro-social direction but to do so they must organize to bring themselves into power politically with new social relations in harmony with the socialized productive forces of modern industrial mass production. Only with political empowerment can working people make the leap to directing the economy without crises and war according to their modern social consciousness, aim, outlook, principles and social relations, working together for the good of all humanity and the social and natural environment.

***Working People Can Do Better!
Unite and Organize to Build the New!***

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