

March 22, 2018

**Firm Opposition to Arrogance and Dictate of
ABI Owners in Bécancour, Quebec**
**Workers Step Up Support for
Locked-Out Workers**



Workers at the Arvida aluminum smelter, members of Unifor Local 1937, send delegation to Bécancour, March 15, 2018, to pledge their financial support to locked-out workers.

Firm Opposition to Arrogance and Dictate of ABI Owners in Bécancour, Quebec

- **Workers Step Up Support for Locked-Out Workers**
- **Union Assesses Loss in Income to Hydro-Quebec from Lockout**

Fight for Security in Retirement!

- **Crisis in the Pension Regime - K.C. Adams**
- **Steelworkers' Pensions Under Attack in Britain**
- **Where's the Democracy? - Bryce Moffat**

United States

- **West Virginia Teachers Defend Their Rights and Dignity**
- **Rail Monopoly Uses Drones to Spy on Railroad Workers Under Hoax of "Safety"**

Firm Opposition to Arrogance and Dictate of ABI Owners in Bécancour, Quebec

Workers Step Up Support for Locked-Out Workers



Rally outside Quebec National Assembly, February 8, 2018, demands government intervene to negotiate an end to the lockout of workers at Aluminerie Bécancour Inc.

Workers in Quebec and Canada have stepped up their actions in support of the locked-out workers at Aluminerie Bécancour Inc (ABI). The owners, Alcoa and Rio Tinto, have refused to negotiate a collective agreement that the ABI workers consider acceptable. On March 8, the ABI bargaining committee came to the table saying that it had no mandate to negotiate anything and that the company was withdrawing its January 10 offer. The workers had already rejected that offer, although they said it had elements that could serve as the basis for an agreement. USW Local 9700, representing the workers, reports that ABI representatives had barely left the room before the company's press release was in the media. The ABI statement talks about the need for a complete restructuring of operations. It attempts to justify the company's refusal to negotiate by claiming that workers sabotaged production in the course of last year. A statement both brutal and irrational, it was clearly written before the bargaining session took place.



The ABI workers have not been intimidated, and they maintain their position that the situation cannot be solved without ABI ceasing its provocations and negotiating a collective agreement that the workers can accept. This position defends the interests of the ABI workers and the Mauricie-Centre-du-Québec region, where ABI is one of the largest employers. For their part, workers in Quebec and Canada consider the refusal to negotiate by the Alcoa-Rio Tinto cartel to be an attack on the dignity and rights of all workers and they are increasing their support for ABI workers. In particular, they are stepping up their financial support to enable the ABI workers to have the financial means to stand up to the arrogance and intransigence of the company.



Arvida aluminum smelter workers pledge \$22,000 per week to locked-out ABI workers

1937) who sent a delegation on March 15 that announced a \$22,000 weekly donation to locked-out ABI workers until the end of the dispute. The delegation came by bus from Saguenay to Bécancour to deliver the first cheque and express their support.

"Our members have agreed to contribute \$10 a week from their paycheques and the local is putting in the equivalent, which makes about \$22,000 a week. We know how important it is in a labour dispute to have the financial resources to support the workers. We think that our actions can help," said Alain Gagnon, the president of the local.

On March 12, a delegation of about forty activists from USW Local 8922, representing Quebec security guards, came to support the locked-out workers. While the security guards are themselves involved in a round of bargaining, representatives took the time to come to Bécancour and announce a monthly donation of \$500 to the ABI workers.

On March 10, USW members at the ArcelorMittal pellet plant in Port-Cartier on the Quebec North Shore announced that they will donate \$400 a month retroactive to January 15 until the end of the conflict. Also on the North Shore, ArcelorMittal's maintenance staff in Fermont and ArcelorMittal's railway and port workers between Port-Cartier and Fermont also offered financial support.



Delegation of USW Local 8922 pledge financial support to ABI workers.

On March 5, the National Union of Aluminum Employees of Baie-Comeau (Confederation of National Trade Unions -- CSN), representing the 650 workers at the Alcoa smelter in Baie-Comeau, announced that it will give \$30,000 in support of the 1,030 workers at the ABI plant.

"With this financial support, our members wanted to show their solidarity with the workers of ABI, helping them during this difficult period," said Michel Desbiens, the president of the union.

"Support continues to flow," Local 9700 President Clément Masse told *Workers' Forum*. "With its behavior, ABI is generating a surge of solidarity that I have rarely seen. We receive help from unions everywhere, from other provinces, from teachers' unions, from workers of various trade union affiliations. Certainly our union is recognized as a union that helps others, and gives good amounts of money to those who are involved in a labour dispute. The workers today are doing it for us. At the same time, the extent of this support is really exceptional. The company will have to sit down with us to resolve the conflict. There is no other solution."

Among the most recent support is that provided by the 1,200 workers at the Arvida aluminum smelter employed by Rio Tinto (Arvida National Union of Aluminum Employees, Unifor Local

"The Baie-Comeau workers are also concerned about what is at stake in Bécancour, both the pension plan and the issue of seniority. We hope the employer gets back to the bargaining table swiftly."

Several USW locals across Canada have announced that they will provide financial support to the Bécancour workers.

Full Support for the Just Struggle of the ABI workers!



Union Assesses Loss in Income to Hydro-Quebec from Lockout



USW Local 9700 facebook graphic pointing out the ABI lockout is depriving Hydro-Québec of an income of \$604,464 a day.

In a March 20 communique, the Syndicat des Métallos (the Quebec section of the United Steelworkers) estimates that for every day of the ABI lockout, the company is depriving Hydro-Québec of \$604,464 in revenue, the value of the electricity it purchases from Quebec's public electricity utility.

The figure is based on a study done by an independent analyst who specializes in the energy sector.

First, the study mentions that from the early hours of the lockout, two of the three sets of aluminum tanks were shut down, which accounts for two-thirds of the plant's aluminum production, which in 2017 was 439,999 metric tons of aluminum.

Decree 1070-2014 dated December 3, 2014, defines the terms of the contract for electricity supply that exists between the Quebec government, Hydro-Québec and the company (currently Alcoa and Rio Tinto).

According to the study, the agreement stipulates that ABI must pay for the whole amount of power it receives under the agreement (735MWh in winter and 730MWh in summer), which is the block of energy reserved for it by Hydro-Québec, regardless of whether it uses it or not. Thus, the company cannot unilaterally decide to reduce its production and pay only for the energy that it actually consumes. In the same vein, it cannot unilaterally significantly reduce its production and still continue to benefit from the preferential rates as set in the agreement. Moreover, according to the study, if the company chooses to significantly reduce its production, it exposes itself to a government imposed penalty. These preferential hydro rates are based on the company's level of aluminum production. When annual production drops below 380,000 tonnes, a penalty may be imposed on ABI.

However, the decree provides in Article 20.4 that in case of "force majeure," which includes a lockout decreed unilaterally by the employer, the employer's obligations under the contract are "suspended." So, because of the "force majeure" provision, ABI does not have to purchase the entire block reserved for it and is not subject to a penalty for reducing production by two-thirds.

The study assesses that because a block of electricity is reserved for ABI yet the latter is not required to pay for it because it is invoking "force majeure," Hydro-Quebec is deprived of significant income.

According to calculations made at the request of the Syndicat des Métallos by this independent expert, Hydro-Québec is deprived of revenues of \$604,464 a day in winter. In the summer, Hydro would be deprived of \$600,352 a day. Thus, from January 11 to March 19 alone, the lockout at ABI has resulted in a loss of income for Hydro-Québec of \$41.7 million.

Over a year, this represents \$220 million (assuming a relative stability of the price of aluminum, since the latter enters into the calculation of the price). Moreover, if the lockout was not considered a case of "force majeure," a two-thirds reduction in production would result in a penalty of \$41.9 million annually.

The union recalls that the Rio Tinto Alcan lockout in Alma 2012 cost Hydro-Québec \$148 million, weighing heavily in the 2012 balance sheet of the Crown corporation. In the case of Rio Tinto in Alma, since the monopoly is a hydro producer with its own dams and power stations in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Hydro-Québec was obliged under the contract to purchase the surplus electricity generated directly by Rio Tinto Alcan at a price determined by contract, which was significantly higher than the price of production, according to the study.

Thus, the Syndicat des Métallos is asking, will Hydro-Quebec and all Quebeckers once again have to pay for what they call the questionable industrial practices of aluminum monopolies?

President of the United Steelworkers local representing the ABI workers, Clément Masse denounces the situation in the communique:

"The company benefits from favourable electricity rates from the Quebec state because it is supposed to create good jobs in the province in return, ... Instead, the company is unilaterally breaking this pact, even though a negotiated resolution is within reach. This is placing a heavy

burden on 1,030 families and the economy of an entire region. And now we understand that Quebeckers as a whole will also be paying the price."



Fight for Security in Retirement!

Crisis in the Pension Regime

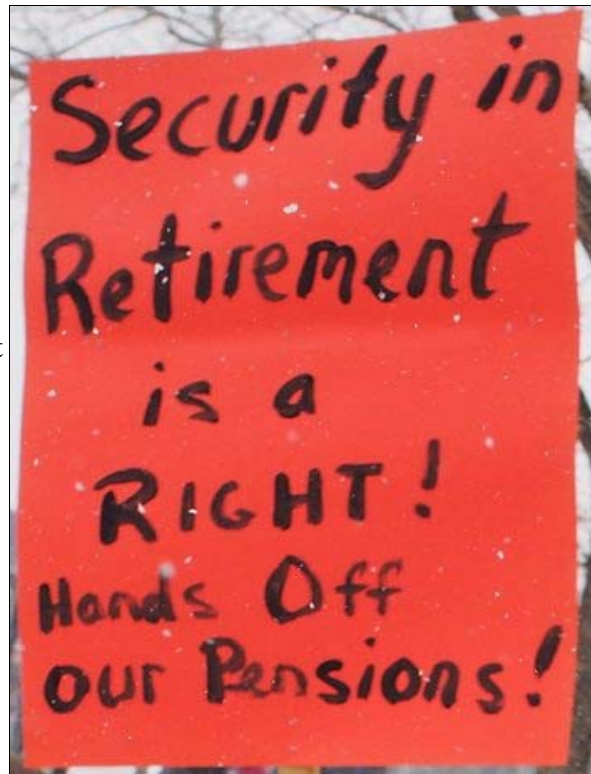
- K.C. Adams -

Private enterprise is incompatible with the functioning of the basic sectors of the modern socialized economy

The crisis of pensions within the imperialist system of states stems from a fundamental contradiction: private ownership and control of the socialized forces of industrial mass production. The fractured and ever-changing character of private ownership of the socialized economy and its aim of maximum money profit for a privileged few lead to unsolvable serious consequences for all aspects of the economy including the pension regime. The social responsibilities of guaranteeing a retirement at society's standard of living clash headlong with the fractured and unstable private ownership and control of the basic sectors. Social responsibility for pensions falls on the private enterprises in control at the present moment, but they are in no position to fulfill those duties nor are they motivated to do so.

Private enterprises cannot keep up with the speed of development in the productive forces. The scientific developments may seem enticing for private enterprise but they have serious consequences for the rate of profit. Maximum money profit is, after all, the aim of private enterprise but developments in the productive forces resulting in increased productivity put downward pressure on the rate of profit. Fewer workers produce the same amount of social product but the overall investment rises considerably.

Rate of profit is calculated as a ratio between the new value workers produce and either the total amount invested or the total amount of transferred-value from material and machinery consumed in the production process. Calculated either way, the rate of profit continually comes under pressure from developments in the productive forces as evidenced in both the goods and services industries.



The British, U.S. and Canadian steel sectors have undergone tremendous changes in the productive forces. What was produced two decades ago can now be produced with a fraction of the workforce. Because the sector is controlled privately and entrapped within the imperialist system of states, the downward pressure on the rate of profit has resulted in one crisis after another. Bankruptcies, destruction of productive forces, restructuring of ownership and the claims of steelworkers, state-

organized pay-the-rich schemes, and now tariff and trade wars are chaotic and destabilizing to say the least. The list is long indeed of ownership changes, movement of production from one country to another, harsh demands for anti-worker concessions from active and retired steelworkers, state-organized pay-the-rich schemes, monopoly manipulation of market prices and destruction of perfectly good productive forces.

The crisis is such that in Britain the destruction of the steel productive forces has been so massive the country as a whole only produces a fraction of what it once did. But the production tonnage reveals only one aspect of the problem; the other emerges from the fact that the reduced total annual amount of 7.5 million metric tonnes today compared with 15.2 million tons in 2000 can be produced with far fewer active steelworkers than were necessary to produce a similar amount 18 years ago.

The phenomenon of fewer workers to produce the same quantity also reduces the total new value workers produce. Machines and material do not produce new value themselves; they facilitate workers producing new value but machines can only transfer the congealed value that previous workers have produced while making those machines and material in the first place. The new value in those machines and material has already been claimed and expropriated and cannot give rise to any additional new value in themselves.

The imperialist system of private ownership and control of the socialized economy does not cherish the additional social product; it craves the money profit from exchanging the social product on the market. But the price of production for the social product falls in inverse relation to the growth in productivity therefore the ratio of new value to the transferred-value from machinery and material falls in tandem driving down the rate of profit.

The crisis resulting from private ownership of the socialized productive forces of industrial mass production is such that Tata Steel, with 8,000 active steelworkers in Britain, holds most of the social responsibility for 124,000 retirees within the British Steel Pension Scheme (BSPS) with additional steelworkers retiring every week.[1] The same is true at Stelco Steel in Hamilton, Ontario where a little more than 500 active steelworkers are left at Hamilton Works yet the number of retirees in the Local's pension plan is around 10,000.

New owners of Stelco, who are only the latest in a growing list, blew up the pension plan within the bankruptcy process of the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act* (CCAA), which had already excluded new hires from joining. In Britain, Tata Steel, the latest in a long list of private owners, has managed to blow up the BSPS outside bankruptcy protection using a combination of state-organized pressure and threats of liquidation.



Pension security requires stability of ownership and control in the socialized economy. This cannot come from private enterprise; it can only come from a form of state control and common ownership that has a modern aim in conformity with the integrated socialized nature of the modern productive forces of industrial mass production. A modern aim cherishes the social product for its use-value in meeting and guaranteeing the well-being of the people and general interests of society, and to humanize the social and natural environment. The modern aim and outlook of the new working class does not view the social product workers produce as something that must

be negated in exchange-value so that money profit can be expropriated for the benefit of a small privileged class of owners of social wealth.

Without renewal of the political process so that the actual producers gain control over the productive forces, social product and state, the battle for pension security will continue to be fraught with upheaval and danger. The working class must do everything its unity and collective power can achieve to defend its pension rights within the current situation, and fight equally hard for democratic renewal of the political process so that it can guarantee the rights of all and resolve the pressing contradiction between the socialized forces of industrial mass production and their antagonistic ownership and control by individuals from a small privileged elite.

Note

1. Tata Steel's global workforce produced 27.5 million metric tonnes of various qualities of steel in 2017. Tata Steel is just one monopoly within the much larger cartel called the Tata Group, a global conglomerate that expropriates the value of production from 700,000 workers worldwide.

Select country annual totals in million metric tonnes of steel for 2017:

- United Kingdom 7.5;
- Canada 13.7;
- United States 81.6;
- south Korea 71.1;
- Russia 71.3;
- India 101.4;
- Japan 104.7;
- China 831.7;
- total for world 1691.2.

The UK steel industry in 1990 employed around 50,000 steelworkers. Only a few thousand more than the 8,000 steelworkers at Tata Steel remain today. The country annual total for UK steel production in 1967 was 24.3 million tonnes, which fell to 15.2 million tons by 2000. The fall in production and employment reflects not only productivity but also the reorganization of the imperialist economy according to the private interests of the global cartels, and not just in steel production but more broadly throughout the manufacturing and other sectors.



Steelworkers' Pensions Under Attack in Britain

India-based Tata Steel Limited with over 80,000 workers producing steel throughout the world announced last year a restructuring of workers' defined benefit pensions in Britain. The attack on pension rights affects 124,000 members of the British Steel Pension Scheme (BSPS). Tata Steel presently has 8,000 active workers at mills in England and Wales. The company is a member of the cartel Tata Group, which expropriates the value of production from 700,000 workers worldwide.

The pension concessions demanded of British steelworkers and retirees affect their actual and potential pension benefits from a restructuring of the BSPS pension plan and its \$26 billion accumulated fund. Tata Steel and state officials threatened pensioners that without concessions to reduce pension benefits and company contributions into the fund from the new value active workers produce, the ruling imperialist elite in control of the steel sector would close the Tata-owned mills.

The aim in reducing pension benefits and company pension plan contributions is to ensure the oligarchs who own and control the mills increase their expropriation of the value steelworkers produce.



Demonstration in Port Talbot against attacks on steelworkers' pensions.

Tata Steel and the state Pensions Regulator together have actively engaged in extorting what belongs to workers by right. They both declared that without anti-worker concessions and a state-organized pay-the-rich infusion of public funds into the private cartel to increase and guarantee the money profit of the owners of equity and debt, the steel sector of the economy could not and would not function. The blackmail they employed is familiar to many Canadian steelworkers. Even the words and threats are similar. They all boil down to the anti-social refrain, "We, the imperialists in control, with the full support and blessings of the state authorities who represent our private interests, refuse to run the economy and steel mills unless our aim for maximum money profit is realized. This demands that you workers must reduce your claims on the value you workers produce both in current wages and pension benefits and the state must provide us public funds. Otherwise we will declare bankruptcy, slam the door on your claims on our private assets, which belong mostly to moneylenders, and either shut the mills endangering your present livelihoods or sell the enterprise for a song to a fellow (insider) investor who will not be encumbered by social responsibilities for existing pensions, other post-employment benefits or environmental remediation."

Workers' Weekly, the online newspaper of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), writes that Tata Steel and the state regulator presented the 124,000 members of the British Steel Pension Scheme with a stark choice either to transfer to an inferior replacement scheme concocted by Tata Steel or to a Pension Protection Fund (PPF). The paper says, "Both schemes will return less on average to workers than the old scheme, but the default option in the case of making no choice -- and many retired workers were not in any position to make such a choice due to ill health -- was the PPF, generally the less beneficial alternative." The pensioners faced a narrow window from October to December 2017 to accept one or another scheme to reduce their pension benefits.

The situation of forcing pensioners to choose between two unpalatable options soon degenerated into the predictable "flock of financial advice 'vultures'" who, as *Workers' Weekly* describes, "descended on the affected workers seeking easy pickings, in a fraud of massive proportions. The pressing deadline created the perfect conditions for these so-called advisers to take advantage. They presented scheme members with a third option of transferring out completely via what is called a DB transfer, an option the (UK Parliament's) Works and Pensions Select Committee, in its report

into the closure of the pension scheme, said is 'not usually in someone's interests!.'



Reports say several billion dollars were taken from pensioners in scams and fees. Two thousand six hundred retirees under pressure from the vultures transferred their pensions to the third option. Upon review, pensioners lost enormous amounts of their benefits, a situation so damaging that police are now involved in investigating how such an egregious theft could take place.

Work and Pensions Select Committee chair Frank Field, a UK government opposition member, remonstrated after the fact: "Pension holders were fleeced by financial vultures.... Once again we find

the pensions regulator fiddling while Rome burns, when it should have seen this rip-off coming.... All the responsible authorities must act, now, to stop more people being cheated."

Workers' Weekly writes, "This whole affair paints a particularly damning picture of the politicization of private interests through this arbitrary decision carried out as one by a big international monopoly, the government and state authorities, a decision that violates the rights of people to a decent livelihood in retirement. It brings into relief the need for workers to organize in defence of their interests and for their own decision-making power over the direction of the economy, so that vital production is not subject to the vagaries of the market, and their claims on the social product in the form of wages, pensions and social programs are guaranteed, depriving monopolies of the power to deprive the workers of these claims."

(With files from "*Workers' Pensions at Tata Steel Stolen by the Rich*," *Workers' Weekly*, March 17, 2018)



Where's the Democracy?

- Bryce Moffat -

In 1773 "The Boston Tea Party" forcefully challenged the scam whereby the American colonies were being taxed by the British Government without having any representation in the British Parliament. It was referred to as "Taxation without Representation"; it was nothing but a monumental tax grab.

Today in Canada, as I see it, Taxation 'with' Representation isn't so hot either, and it's going to get increasingly worse if working people continue to condone it. With the way our parliament's structured, some of our politicians can't, and others just won't, do anything about it, regardless of what they say at election time.



When working peoples' Charter rights are violated, legally of course, they're often left with no way

of amicably resolving the problems that have been forced upon them. When they make an effort to fight an injustice, restrictions are often in place to make any challenge very difficult, and always exorbitantly expensive. When the government or the corporate elite are the ones being challenged, the issue is often left unresolved to their benefit, as it's only the very wealthy who can afford to take protracted court action against them. As for the rest, as Marie Antoinette once said, "Let them eat cake."

In a Capitalist system, people can progress on their own merits, and that's great. It tends to find a place for these people, and also for those who by circumstance take a secondary role. Unfortunately, it also provides ample opportunity for corporate freeloaders who want to leach a free ride on society.

While all this is going on, the powerful become ever more powerful, holding firm control over the police forces with which they can then forcefully control those who challenge their cause. In this way, under the authority of their positions they can smugly assume the public is too constrained to challenge them. If working people, in their defensive endeavour, run afoul of the law the authorities can then quickly deal with the problem on a crime and punishment basis instead of addressing the problem.



A good example of this happening today is the incident at the G20 conference in Toronto in 2010. As I see it, it gave a strong message about what our democratic leaders think of our Charter rights. Another example, and there are many, is their pattern of forcing back-to-work legislation upon people who are legally and justifiably on strike; or allowing corporations to blatantly abscond, legally of course, with pensioners' retirement savings that they've built up over many years of work and saving. On the particular issue of private pension security the Federal Government has been formally approached about conducting a public inquiry in an effort to address our rightful concerns but has out rightly refused to act.

The establishment has many avenues they can use to try to influence our way of thinking. Often laced with obscure phrases in personal interviews, panel discussions and other venues, issues are subtly presented with suave, flowing rhetoric, intended to steer working people into accepting the corporate world's self-serving agenda. When listening to or reading these statements, reading between the lines can often be as informative as the text itself if we heed what it doesn't say as well as what it does say. Presentations like these, as I see it, fit well as "Red Herrings," put there to distract the unwary and manipulate those easily influenced.

As evidence of this, we often get only a carefully scripted part of a news story; a one-sided character assassination of one person, while leaving some other guy spotless. We hear very little about the gas plant fiasco in Oakville, or our Gross National Debt which shows, in part at least, what a monumental mess this country's really in. This whole scenario invites one to muse at just how much of working people's money is really being squandered on things that we will never ever see the benefit of.

We as voters still have the "Democratic Right" to elect people to represent us in Parliament, or whatever it is they do in parliament. Unfortunately, far too many of our very well-paid members of

parliament have become unwitting pawns in a system created to satisfy the greed of the powerful elite, and we the voters are the unwitting pawns that put them there.

Bryce Moffat is retired from the former "Stelco" plant in Hamilton, Ontario and is a retired member of Local 1005 USW. Email: Brycemoffat2@gmail.com.



United States

West Virginia Teachers Defend Their Rights and Dignity



Teachers and supporters rally March 2, 2018, at state legislature in Charleston, West Virginia.

Workers' Forum congratulates the 34,000 West Virginia teachers and other public school employees who stood up to defend themselves and public education. On March 7, after state-wide strike actions which began on February 22, the state authorities were forced to back down and pass into law the teachers' and education workers' main demands, including a five per cent pay raise. As other state employees were quite visibly encouraged by the courage and actions of the teachers and, according to reports, were gearing up for their own battles, the pay raise was extended in law across the board to all state workers not just teachers.

Public sector workers in West Virginia face a backward anti-social government that represents the narrow private interests of the ruling rich elite and uses police powers to deprive workers of their rights. Public sector unions are not recognized in law. The ones that do exist can only collect voluntary union dues from individual workers. No public employer has the legal authority to bargain collective terms of employment with their employees. Teachers have no collective bargaining rights or contracts and no legal right to take any form of job action. If they do, they face police powers such as injunctions, fines, imprisonment, suspension and loss of employment.

Teachers have not received any substantial pay raise in years and have faced steep actual and proposed increases in payments for the medical insurance program through the Public Employee Insurance Agency. West Virginia state authorities have pushed an aggressive anti-social austerity agenda leaving social programs and public services deeply underfunded and incapable of meeting their social responsibilities. The teachers say their pay is the fourth lowest of all states.

According to U.S. media, the teachers articulated their five main demands as follows:

- Defeat through legislation an expansion of charter schools;
- Kill a proposal to eliminate work seniority;
- Scuttle a state bill aimed at further weakening unions by taking away their right to deduct voluntary union dues through payroll collection;
- Reduce the health-insurance fees and address the health care crisis with increased taxes on big business;
- Provide an immediate pay raise of at least 5 per cent.



As teachers have no collective agreement even the pay raise had to be passed into law by the state legislature and signed by the Governor. The teachers have no illusions about the unrepresentative nature of the official West Virginia political system, which is controlled and dominated by a billionaire Governor and other representatives of big business. The political and economic ruling elite would have to be forced to come to some agreement, which is what the teachers accomplished.

To challenge the state authorities and achieve their demands, public teachers and other education workers strengthened the existing unions with mass participation and an invigorated local leadership. They demanded the state authorities sign into law their five basic demands. To add urgency to the situation, the teachers organized a two-day statewide strike starting February 22, followed by a two day extension, that closed all public schools throughout the state. The West Virginia authorities threatened punishing fines and other attacks but the teachers remained adamant to have their five demands accepted and written into law.

The state Governor, a coal and agricultural oligarch, on February 27 promised to meet the teachers' demands, but only in words, as the state legislature refused to put the agreement into law. In response, the education workers held mass meetings and rallies throughout the state at which they voted overwhelmingly to continue the strike until their demands were signed into law. Throughout the strike the teachers and their supporters held spirited rallies in their home counties and at the state capitol in Charleston. By all reports, the rallies were broadly attended by many of the 277,000 students affected and their parents.



Vigil at state legislature, one of the mass actions organized by teachers and their supporters.

A feature of the strike was the initiative of school Superintendents from all 55 counties to close all public schools. The Chief Superintendent said the teachers had shown remarkable determination and unity for their cause and had won such widespread support from the people that it would be prudent to close the schools and avoid escalating the dispute through state police measures.

Through mass mobilization and tirelessly disseminating their views among the people, the teachers successfully organized a statewide work stoppage and in doing so gained significant support for their just cause. The key was the release of the human factor and its individual and collective energy. Teachers and their supporters found inventive ways to mobilize themselves, contacting each other on the Internet and holding mass meetings in unorthodox venues such as closed-down deserted shopping malls.



March 5, 2018 rally at state legislature in Charleston.

The working class is the centre of the socialized economy producing the value the people and society require for their existence. Teachers transfer society's accumulated knowledge from one generation to the next and in doing so increase the objectified value of every person's capacity to work. Teachers and other members of the working class are the wellspring from which social relations and political institutions can be renewed and modernized to conform to the socialized economy. Defending themselves with courage and determination, West Virginia public school teachers and other workers found a way forward to defend their rights in the moment from the attacks of the narrow private interests of the ruling oligarchy and have taken a big step forward in standing up for their rights and social programs. The issue now for them, as with all workers, is how to sustain the march forward through building their independent organizations, thinking and voice.



Rail Monopoly Uses Drones to Spy on Railroad Workers Under Hoax of "Safety"

It was reported earlier this month that U.S. monopoly Union Pacific Railroad is using drones to spy on its workers under the hoax of making sure that they are following safety rules. Union Pacific is a freight hauling railroad that operates 8,500 locomotives over 32,100 route-miles in 23 states west of Chicago and New Orleans. It is the second largest rail company in the United States, after Berkshire Hathaway Inc.'s BNSF Railway, and it is one of the world's largest transportation companies. The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) first approved the use of drones by Union Pacific in 2015. Now the company has 126 certified drone pilots on staff to inspect railways and bridges with drones. The company first started using drones to spy on its workers in December 2017. Other railroad companies also use drones. BNSF received a waiver from the FAA to fly beyond line-of-sight and at night. CSX uses drones to, among other things, inspect their railroad network. Norfolk Southern Corp. performs bridge inspections with drones.



U.S. rail workers firmly oppose the use of drones to spy on them both as an attack on their dignity and privacy and as an attack on their health and safety and the health and safety of communities. They report that to have these drones flying over their heads when they work is dangerous. It is distracting so workers tend to look up instead of looking ahead and paying attention to the task at hand. The drones undermine their ability to concentrate on their work and this undermines their peace of mind. Railroad workers also say that the drones are going to be used as a way to criminalize and discipline workers

under the hoax that they are breaking the rules. Punishment of workers, already rampant on the railways including against workers who denounce unsafe working conditions, is increasing as workers are being cited for violations as a result of the drone monitoring. At the moment, the response of the affected workers has been to flood the Union Pacific safety hotline with complaints against the use of drones and to file complaints with both the FAA and the Federal Railroad Administration.

Union Pacific Corp halted the aerial monitoring of its employees on March 1 in order to look for a so-called "collaborative process" with the unions for the use of these drones. It also announced that it is planning to resume the surveillance in coming weeks.

Union Pacific's claim that it is using the drones as a way to make sure that workers abide by the safety rules is simply not true. In fact, it is the railways that have been putting the health and safety of workers and the public at increased risk by undermining safety for years. They have reduced inspections and mechanical maintenance so as to keep the trains in motion with as little downtime as possible. They have reduced their unionized workforce in order to weaken the united organized struggle of the workers for their rights, including their right to healthy and safe working conditions. It is a known fact on the ground, as reported by workers in many sectors, that managerial staff of transport companies are themselves pushing workers to cut corners on health and safety while at the same time putting in place all kinds of measures to blame and punish the workers when there are accidents, blaming them for incidents and for injuries and casualties, and attempting to silence their voice.

Canadian workers, and especially rail workers, can appreciate the similarity between what is happening in the U.S. and their own experience. It would not be surprising if the Canadian railways adopted this further step of using drones for "safety purposes" as a way to remain competitive with the U.S. railways. Bill C-49, now before the Senate, is legislation drawn up by the Trudeau government and supported by railways such as CN and CP. It would mandate the companies to install voice and video recorders in locomotives and give them access to those recordings. There is no end to these reckless and adventurous measures unless the workers organize to have them banned.

The target of all this, to serve the narrow private interests of the rail monopolies, is the human factor, which is deployed through the organized struggle of the workers to defend their rights and the rights of all and safeguard their safety and the safety of communities. Only this conscious pro-social activity of the organized workers can bring about a reversal of the situation that is going to be favourable to workers and society. When they are made aware of the use of the drones to spy on the workers in the U.S., Canadian workers are reminded of the words of the CP Rail representatives and others at the parliamentary hearing on Bill C-49 when they said that railways are safe as far as equipment and tracks are concerned and what remains to be dealt with are the "human factors" that are the leading cause of rail incidents. One of these representatives even fantasized that one day processes would be "fully automated" and then accidents would be a thing of the past. Far from it, the way to achieve and improve rail safety and safe conditions in other industries is for the workers themselves to put the human factor into play through the conscious class struggle for safe conditions, and through the professional operation of the railways according to the highest standards and with the aim of serving the needs of the people. This is what will protect the workers and the communities in which the transport systems operate.

"Rail safety" cannot be a matter of threats and a police regime that hangs over the heads of the workers so that monopolies can have a free hand to pursue their narrow private aim of maximum profit and workers are criminalized and silenced. The use of drones and other means to spy on workers actually makes the railways more, not less, dangerous. Rail workers' opposition to unsafe working conditions is part and parcel of the workers' struggle for their rights and the rights of all. Under the current conditions of the anti-social offensive it is a life and death struggle every day to oppose these reckless and dangerous moves the monopolies and governments keep coming up with to serve their narrow interests and block the workers from taking the initiative to solve the problem in a way that is beneficial to society.

Workers in Canada denounce the use of these drones against the U.S. rail workers and support the fight of the rail workers in the U.S. so that it is abolished.

