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November 1 Day of Action in Defence of Migrant Rights
Raise the Call: Status for All!



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November 1 Day of Action in Defence of Migrant Rights

Raise the Call: Status for All!

The Migrant Rights Network has called for a national day of action on Sunday, November 1 to once again raise the call for *Status for All!* Actions will include pickets, rallies, online events, banner drops, posterings, leafletting and phoning the office of the Prime Minister and of local Members of Parliament. Migrant Workers Alliance for Change has announced a live facebook event -- Niagara:

Mourning the Dead, Fighting for the Living -- Status for All. The Workers' Centre of CPC(M-L) has called for a picket in front of the Toronto constituency office of the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship at 11:00 am. *Worker's Forum* calls on our readers to take up the demand of Status for All and organize or join in the actions.



Migrante and la Association de Mexicanos en Calgary visit an Alberta farm on Thanksgiving, share a meal, games and karaoke before the migrant workers return home for the season.

Participants in the November 1 actions will be collecting signatures for the Status for All open letter initiated by the Migrant Rights Network before the recent Throne Speech and opening of Parliament. Over 350 organizations, including the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist), signed the open letter which states, "We the under-signed call for a single-tier immigration system, where everyone in Canada has the same rights. All migrants, refugees, students, workers and undocumented people in the country must be regularized and given full immigration status now without exception. All migrants arriving in the future must do so with full and permanent immigration status." The government has failed in its duty. The rights of all must be recognized!

Status for all would, for example, end the situation where a worker is tied to a single employer. It would allow migrant workers a pathway to permanent residency, remove the obstacles that currently restrict the labour and collective bargaining rights of agricultural workers and enable access to supports that are available only to those with status in Canadian society.

Denial of status is a significant factor in the spread of COVID-19 among agricultural workers. In Ontario alone there have been 1,100 COVID-19 compensation claims from agricultural workers -- 17 per cent of the 6,600 COVID-19 compensation cases in the province -- and, according to the *Toronto Star*, many cases were simply not reported. The overwhelming majority of these claims were from migrant workers. Neither the government nor the agribusiness owners took the measures necessary to protect these workers. The United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), together with the Agricultural Workers Alliance took it upon themselves to distribute thousands of masks to temporary and migrant agricultural workers -- as well as all other workers in need of protective equipment for work -- at the union's Agriculture Workers Support Centre in Leamington.



In Alberta, UFCW recently reported that, because of the work of the union and migrant rights advocacy groups, conditions have improved in the meat packing plants which were so hard hit with COVID-19 outbreaks earlier this year. However, two outbreaks were declared in August, this time at the Cargill case-ready meat packing plant and at the Harmony Beef plant in Calgary, both of which

are now over. An outbreak has now been reported at Capital Fine Meats in Edmonton. More than 1,600 workers in total had been infected earlier at Cargill's High River plant and the JBS Canada plant in Brooks, east of Calgary.



Foreign students have also faced great difficulty due to lack of status during the pandemic. There are nearly 700,000 foreign students in Canada on post-graduate work permits and study permits. Foreign students pay nearly four times the tuition paid by domestic students, adding an estimated \$22 billion to the Canadian economy in the 2016-17 academic year. Their tuition fees account for roughly 30 per cent of total undergraduate tuition fee revenues of Canadian universities. Their fees are sustaining post-secondary education in Canada yet they are bearing a tremendous burden and difficulty because of their precarious

status. Their study programs were disrupted. Their employment opportunities were disrupted. Their study visas and work permits expired. It is completely unjust.

Workers' Forum once again calls on our readers to take up the call of *Status for All!* Visit the Migrant Rights Network website migrantrights.ca for more information on how you can be involved.

(Photos: Migrante Alberta, D. Hammond, J. Campbell)



Anti-Worker Schemes Using Pandemic as Pretext

The Defence of Workers' Rights is Key to Stop the Propagation of COVID-19

- Pierre Chénier -



Quebec health care workers defend their rights and affirm; "We are the solution," "Demand a better health care system."

The COVID-19 crisis continues to be used as an excuse by government executives to attack workers and people and further privatize health care and social services. Thirty years and more of the anti-social offensive has resulted in the normalization of practices which divert a massive amount of state funds from patient care to the coffers of multinational corporations in construction and support

services including food services, housekeeping, IT, nursing care and others. It has also resulted in the proliferation of private-for-profit operators in seniors' care. The system is in crisis and the norms for which workers fought are being eroded. This anti-social offensive is being strengthened in the conditions of the COVID-19 crisis and this is having a dramatic effect on the lives of the people, increasing the danger during phase two of the pandemic that has already set in.

For example, the number of resignations of health care staff has hugely increased all over Quebec.



Just in Montreal, it is now estimated by the unions representing workers in the Integrated University Health and Social Services Centre (CIUSSS) of Montreal East that more than 1,800 workers have resigned since the beginning of this year. These are workers from all categories -- nurses, housekeeping staff, food service workers, clerical and administrative support workers, etc. They either leave the sector, take early retirement (with the penalty it imposes on their pension benefits) or stay in the sector but go to work for private hiring agencies. If they go to work for private agencies,

workers sacrifice their benefits, including pensions, because the income they get from the agency is not pensionable, in order to have what the agencies call freedom of choice in hours of work. This means that their hours are scheduled ahead of time by contract and cannot be extended through mandatory overtime.

Workers also report that more and more of the private hiring agencies are involved in human trafficking. Through a system of subcontracting, the agency that contracts with the public authority subcontracts to others who may again subcontract and the end result is that there are many health care workers who are undocumented, with no rights whatsoever. The numerous demonstrations of migrant workers without permanent status or who are undocumented have amply shown the systematic mistreatment that these workers are subjected to as a disposable workforce and the role that the private hiring agencies play. The number of unorganized and precarious workers in health care is constantly increasing.

As private hiring agencies proliferate in the conditions of the crisis in the public health care sector, it is becoming more and more common for managers of public integrated health and social services centres to themselves become owners of private hiring agencies. A strata is being groomed from within the leadership of the public health care system to become the owners of private agencies so as to increase the number of workers hired through them and to dismantle norms and standards and continuity of health care. For example, private hiring agencies can send workers to one health establishment one day and to another the next day, and in this way workers become potential vectors in the propagation of the virus.

As well, the collective agreements of Quebec public sector workers expired on March 31 and the unions report that negotiations are going nowhere because the government is ignoring the workers' demands and is trying to impose concessions that



will only further aggravate the situation in the sector.

For example, the Fédération de la santé du Québec has revealed some of the government's concessionary demands. One of these demands is to redefine overtime by averaging the hours of work over more than a week. The current work week is defined as a five-day week. Any hours over the agreed upon regular hours have to be paid at the overtime rate. Averaging the hours of work over more than five days will make it possible for employers to pay regular rates even when workers are forced to extend their hours of work in a day. Meanwhile, in the name of "flexibility," the government wants to create work schedules in which the number of days could vary from one week to another. These are not only serious economic attacks against workers but also provocations that contribute to the burnout and resignations of health care workers.

Health care workers are rejecting this provocation and blackmail and insisting that immediate improvements must be made in health care and social services on the basis of their demands. Workers are defending their ability to act collectively through their defence organization and to speak as one to defend themselves and protect the people they care for. The collective action of workers and their implementation of safety measures is a key factor in stopping the propagation of the virus. The situation clearly shows the need to change the direction of health care and social services, to completely eliminate private profiteering from the system.

As workers are stepping up their fight for their rights and the rights of all *Workers' Forum* opens its pages to make the voice of the workers heard.



Letter to the Editor

I read with interest the articles you published on the Legault government's decrees in response to the pandemic. I too believe that they are not a solution to this serious crisis. It doesn't bode well because it takes away workers' rights. When you force workers to observe rules they had no contribution in adopting, the measures cannot be implemented.

In addition, decrees take away citizens' freedoms. Mandating the police to enter homes with telewarrants to see if there is an illegal gathering does not make any sense and does not bode well for the future either.



I think a lot of people are starting to think that the COVID-19 problem is not being well managed, that decisions are being made too late in the name of not hurting the economy. And now the government is trying to catch up with its new decrees. My impression is that Public Health is being contradicted by the government in order not to harm the economy. The problem of COVID-19 is more complex than a question of government decrees. We are falling into abuse of power.

For example, they still haven't solved the problems facing nurses. Nurses have crying needs that are still not being addressed after months of pandemic. The government calls them our guardian angels but the angels are on the front lines and are exhausted and many are resigning. Mandatory overtime still exists. Nurses are not allowed to speak up when faced with situations that don't make sense in hospitals. If they do speak, they are disciplined by employers. It's like the code of silence, the *omerta*. Let's put ourselves in their shoes. In a democratic country we cannot accept this.

In the mining sector, we were in favour of adopting certain measures because we decided them together with the company through consultation. Now the tendency is developing that they inform us that they are going to put measures in place and we are just supposed to apply them. That's not consultation. We have the right to give our views because we have to live with the measures. For example, employers in the mining sector are talking about making masks mandatory in the mines. Did they think about the fact that underground we work at 38 degrees Celsius and 100 per cent humidity? The workers are not going to wear them. Moreover, it has already been proven that ordinary masks will not protect us from the droplets through which the virus is transmitted. Will they give us N95 masks? The measures must be scientifically proven and the workers must be mobilized in the solution of the problem.

If we want the measures to be applied but workers are not involved in the decision-making process, it is doomed to fail. If you proceed by imposing measures, workers will challenge you. Workers must be involved in the decision.

If health measures are put in place, workers must be given information and on-the-job training on the application of those health measures. In our case, when we adopted the measures at the beginning, after consultation with our workers, we even toured with the foremen in the mine to promote the measures. The purpose of the tours was not to say that we were very satisfied with the measures, but that we thought they were the best measures available to us in the current context to prevent people from contracting COVID-19.

To be able to do this, the workers' representatives must have cutting-edge information to make decisions that provide the best possible prevention. Because in fact, it is prevention that we are talking about here. If the employer alone decides on the measures, prevention will not take place. We are talking about the health and safety of the workers and communities. Workers must have a say in what is going to happen.



A mining worker in Abitibi

(Translated from original french by Workers' Forum.)



Workers' Actions in Defence of Rights

Solidarity Action for Striking Ledcor Workers

- Roland Verrier -

Workers on strike against Ledcor Technical Services (LTS) were joined on their picket lines outside the LTS production facility in Port Coquitlam and the Ledcor head office in downtown Vancouver by dozens of supporters on September 30. That day was the first anniversary of the start of the strike by members of IBEW Local 213. The year has been marked by expressions of support and solidarity from the New Westminster and District Labour Council, which was the main organizer of the September 30 action, as well as the BC Building Trades, United Steelworkers (USW) Local 1944, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the BC Teachers' Federation, the Hospital Employees'

Union, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, and others. Besides the workers who joined the picket lines with their union flags and banners, dozens more joined a caravan of cars in response to the call of the local and the labour council.



The workers at Leducor and their supporters make the point that what is happening in the telecommunications industry with monopolies like Telus and "subcontractors" like Leducor, which are contracted to do some of the fibre optic cable installations that Telus employees also do, is happening in other industries as well. The contractor's workforce is unorganized, paid at piece work rates that the company can unilaterally change, pressured to work at an unsafe pace, without stable and predictable schedules, disciplined or even terminated without recourse. Besides the toll this takes on the workers themselves, this arrangement is used to put downward pressure on the wages and working conditions of the Telus employees who are members of USW Local 1944. The Leducor workers organized so that they could act collectively to improve their conditions. As one of the striking workers put it, "We are not just fighting for me or the guy next to me. We are fighting for the technician in five years from today and the technician 15 years from today."

Throughout the strike the company has been using scabs to do the work of the striking workers which it claims is legal because the telecommunications industry is federally regulated and federal law does not prohibit the use of scabs. The union is asking that Telus customers requesting installation of residential or business telephones, Internet, television, or alarms "insist that the services be provided by unionized Telus employees. Customers might have to wait a bit longer for their service, but they will have less risk of damage to their homes or businesses, and support striking IBEW Local 213 workers at the same time."

The union's request for the Canada Labour Board to intervene and settle the terms and conditions of a first collective agreement is to be heard by the board this month. Until that time everyone is



encouraged to continue to support the demands of the striking Leducor workers through sharing information on social media and joining them on their picket lines at Leducor's new production facility at 2120 Vintner Street in Port Moody or Leducor's corporate office at 1055 W. Hastings Street in Vancouver.



(Photos: WF)



Striking Dominion Workers Face Intransigence of Loblaw Monopoly

- Louis Lang -



Striking Dominion workers' picket line in St. John's, Newfoundland, October 15, 2020.

Eleven Dominion stores across Newfoundland have been closed as 1,400 Dominion workers, members of Unifor Local 597, have been on strike since August 22. The workers voted to strike in

June, calling for more full-time jobs after 60 were cut in 2019, leaving its workforce at more than 80 per cent part-time employees. Parent company Loblaw Companies Limited also ended its \$2-an-hour pandemic wage increase. Workers have been without a new contract since October 2019.

In interviews with the Canadian Press over the holiday weekend, Dominion workers said they're fighting not only for themselves, but for retail workers across the country. The vote to strike came after Loblaws, Sobeys and other major grocery store chains eliminated a \$2-an-hour pay increase offered during the height of the first wave of the pandemic. The Newfoundland workers have rejected a contract offer from Loblaw Companies Ltd., Dominion's parent company, that included a pay raise of \$1 an hour over the next three years.

At the end of August the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador granted an injunction against striking grocery store workers. The injunction states workers cannot interfere with Loblaw's right to remove inventory that is or may become stale-dated, or with contractors who are entering the property to replenish fuel for refrigeration of inventory in tractor trailers, or who are delivering or removing cash.

Immediately after the injunction was granted the company declared in a letter to the union that because "competition is fierce, business at Dominions across Newfoundland is in decline," the company would not change its offer and has refused to participate in any further negotiations.

A October 8 union press release quotes Unifor Local 597 President Carolyn Wrice: "Over the past six weeks Loblaws has continued to sell its products at No Frills and Shoppers Drug Mart. While the company continues to rake in increased profits during the pandemic,[1] it also continues to refuse to pay its frontline workers a living wage. [...] The workers have received tremendous support from the public during this strike and today we are asking them to join us in sending a message to Loblaw and its Chairman Galen Weston."



Dominion workers hold Thanksgiving food drive on picket lines across the province.

In addition to maintaining picket lines, striking Dominion workers are helping to provide meals to food insecure people across Newfoundland and Labrador with a Thanksgiving food drive at picket lines across the province. Members of the public donated non-perishable food items at picket lines at the 11 Newfoundland Dominion stores.

Faced with the refusal of the company to negotiate, workers are determined not to accept the company's claim that "reduced profitability due to the pandemic," justifies turning 80 per cent of the workforce into part-time staff and refusing to pay the workers a living wage. Dominion workers in Newfoundland have declared that the strike will continue and this issue will be raised nationally, calling on the workers at Loblaws brands across the country to stand in support of the right of workers to negotiate acceptable wages and working conditions.



Picket at a No Frills store in St. John's.

Note

1. From March to September, during the first wave of COVID-19, the Weston family's net worth increased a whopping \$1.6 billion dollars, reports a Unifor Media Release, September 29, 2020.

(Photos: Unifor Local 597)



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