

December 15, 2021 - No. 120

Lac-Mégantic Tragedy: Where Are We Eight Years Later?
Join the Discussion!



Status for All! Social Programs for All!

- **Migrant Workers Demand Full Access to Employment Insurance Benefits**

Lac-Mégantic Tragedy: Where Are We Eight Years Later?
Join the Discussion!



Wednesday, December 15 - 7:00 pm ET
Montreal
1360 Ontario St. E.

To reserve a seat: 514-522-5872
*If attending in person masks, social distancing and proof
of vaccine passport is required.*

Join on Zoom

To participate via Zoom [click here](#).
Simultaneous translation into English

This evening, at 7:00 pm ET, Robert Bellefleur, spokesperson for the Coalition of Citizens and Organizations Committed to Railway Safety in Lac-Mégantic, and Anne-Marie Saint-Cerny, author of the book "Mégantic" and the comic strip "Mégantic, un train dans la nuit" will be speaking at a public meeting in Montreal. Participants from across the country can join via Zoom. The meeting is in support of the fight of the community of Lac-Mégantic for its safety and for rail safety for all communities in Quebec and Canada.

The Lac-Mégantic tragedy is one of the most devastating rail tragedies in Canadian history. In the early hours of July 6, 2013, a train with cars filled with highly flammable oil -- falsely labeled as lightly flammable -- transported in tank cars that were not appropriate for such hazardous material, on rail tracks that were not properly maintained, rolled downhill, derailed and exploded in downtown Lac-Mégantic, causing the death of 47 people, serious injuries to numerous others, severe post-traumatic stress for the population and very extensive property damage.

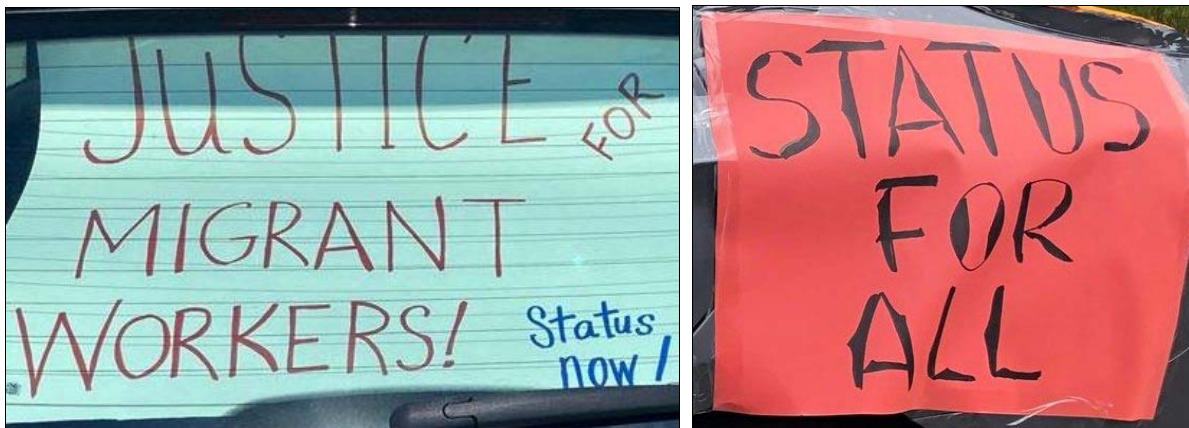
Important information is going to be presented on what caused the tragedy and on the fight to make sure that people put an end to these tragedies.

All are invited to listen to the presentations and take part in the conversation.



Status for All! Social Programs for All!

Migrant Workers Demand Full Access to Employment Insurance Benefits



In a November 28 letter to Prime Minister Trudeau and several Cabinet Ministers, Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW) demands full access to Employment Insurance (EI) benefits for migrant workers and to all social programs and public services in existence in Canada. It also reiterates the

demand for permanent status for migrant workers on arrival in Canada.



On the issue of EI, the letter points out that since 1966, workers employed through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) have contributed millions of dollars to the EI regime but have been denied access to it as a result of their tied work permits. Tens of thousands of migrant workers come to Canada every year from a dozen countries to work on Canadian farms and in greenhouses through which they are tied to a single employer and denied options to change jobs. They pay into EI through payroll deductions but are ineligible for Employment Insurance if they lose that job. They are denied EI benefits if the job to which they are tied ends, as they are then deemed "not available for work" because they are bound to that one employer, even when that employer cannot or will not employ them.

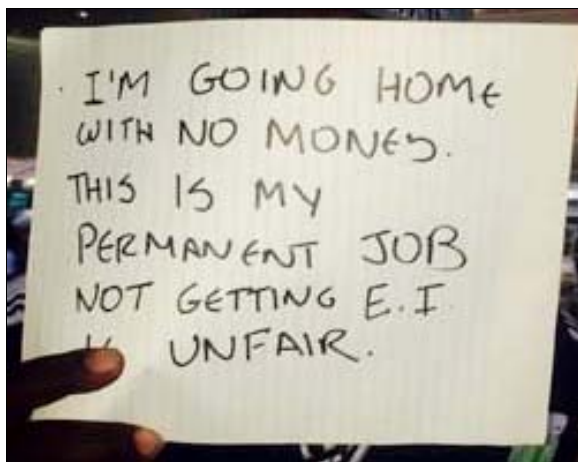
Workers who have lost or lose their employment as a result of the pandemic, crop loss or environmental crises can be terminated and repatriated because of the conditions related to their work permit. As well, most seasonal workers do not qualify for special EI benefits, including maternity, parental, sickness or compassionate leave.

The letter states, in part:

"With respect to access to regular EI benefits, migrants face multiple barriers. We have seen this with the ongoing pandemic and closure of multiple workplaces, but workers are also impacted by climate change. Pre-pandemic, agricultural migrants have been terminated and repatriated because of crop loss attributed to environmental or direct human factors. The current climate disaster in British Columbia is only the latest salvo in an ongoing devastating environmental disaster that has disproportionately impacted vulnerable communities.

"Migrant farm workers have experienced the impact of climate change both in their home country and currently here in Canada. In 2017, for example, migrant farm workers from Dominica were stranded in Canada as a result of the devastation that was inflicted on the island from Hurricane Maria. No policies existed then or now to support this group of workers. Advocacy groups wrote to the federal government to develop immediate steps to address this failure of the government to assist in this prior crisis, but their calls for action to prevent climate racism were met with silence.

"This past season's fires, extreme heat, and now flooding have created significant obstacles for the agricultural industry. While both provincial and federal governments have developed support mechanisms to assist the industry, still no steps have been taken to support the industry's workers. It is essential that the federal government develop proactive measures not piecemeal efforts to address the long term consequences of pandemics, economic uncertainty, and climate change. Short-term relief will not address systemic policy failures. Climate and economic injustice are intertwined both for migrants here and their home countries.



Current EI policies undermine migrants' access to income support. These issues will only heighten as climate disasters become more frequent and severe."

Justicia presents a series of demands to provide justice to migrant workers. They include permanent status on arrival; no reprisals, repatriation or disbarment of migrant workers for exerting their rights; ensuring migrant and non-status workers have access to EI benefits; immediately changing closed work permits to open permits so that workers stop being trapped in untenable situations; reversing all decisions that denied regular EI benefits to migrant workers and providing full special benefits to them, and many others.

Workers' Forum fully supports these demands for justice for migrant workers. Migrant workers are part of the Canadian working class which does not recognize the categories that the ruling elite has created in an attempt to divide people. This division is used to justify the super-exploitation of those accorded fewer rights. Modern definitions recognize only one humanity and governments at every level have a duty to guarantee the rights of all.

To read J4MW's full letter, [click here](#).



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