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Vancouver Rally Marks Second Anniversary of Ledcor Workers Strike

**Militant Denunciation of Company and Government
Violation of Workers' Rights**

Since September 2019 members of IBEW 213 have steadfastly maintained picket lines at the Ledcor Technical Services (LTS) office in Port Moody and the company's head office in Vancouver. As the workers enter the 25th month of their strike, a militant rally was held at the LTS head office in

support of their just demands and to denounce Ledcor and the federal government for obstinately refusing to settle a first contract for these workers. Speaker after speaker pledged their support for the workers' just demands.



The workers joined IBEW 213 in 2017 and attempted to negotiate a contract with the company for two years to improve their wages and working conditions and put an end to LTS subcontracting their work. On September 30, 2019 they went on strike after the company laid off 31 workers without cause or notice. They have maintained picket lines at the LTS headquarters in Vancouver and at their workplace, now in Port Moody, ever since.

The workers' main work is the installation of fibre-optic cable. Telus and other major communications companies, besides employing their own workers, contract with companies like LTS which pays its technicians on a piece work basis which means they earn far less and have inferior benefits to Telus employees doing the same work. LTS in turn subcontracts work to other companies. The telecommunications monopolies use this method of subcontracting work to companies like LTS as a means of eliminating the permanent workforce and to turn all technicians into individual "independent contractors" without protection under the *Canada Labour Code* (federal) or provincial legislation, in BC the *Employment Standards Act*.



The rally on October 1 was organized with the support of the BC Federation of Labour, the Vancouver and District Labour Council, the New Westminster and District Labour Council and numerous unions including the Building Trades Unions, United Steelworkers, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees and Unite Here Local 40. Speakers denounced the company for its treatment of the workers and the federal labour law that permits companies to use scab labour, as well as the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) for the delays in addressing numerous complaints filed by the union in 2019, not issuing its ruling until July 26, 2021.

Robin Nedila, IBEW 213 representative for the LTS workers, reports that "the CIRB found that LTS violated the *Canada Labour Code* by refusing to recognize IBEW 213 as the bargaining agent for all employees of the certification," a decision which "caused irreparable harm to the IBEW 213's bargaining potential." He explained that workers in one department were deliberately and strategically lied to by the company, told that they were not members of the union. The union's other complaints were dismissed.

In December 2019 the union applied to the Canada Labour Board to intervene and settle the terms and conditions of a first collective agreement as specified in section 80 (1)-(4) of the *Canada Labour Code* which allows the board to "inquire into the dispute and, if the board considers it advisable, to settle the terms and conditions of the first collective agreement between the parties." The Board deferred a decision on this application to after the decision of the CIRB on the union's unfair labour practices complaints.

The LTS workers have had broad support from workers and unions and the public throughout the strike. Those at the rally pledged their ongoing support, both financial and on the picket lines.

(Photos: WF, BC Building Trades, K. Ranaletta)



Deterioration of Occupational Health and Safety in Quebec

A Call to Action to Defend Rights and Human Lives

The Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) reports a steady rise in the annual number of occupational injuries in the period between 2016 and 2020. The FTQ analyzed data supplied by the CNESST (Labour Standards, Pay Equity and Workplace Health and Safety Board), the agency mandated by the government to enforce Quebec's labour laws.

An article published recently in *Le Journal de Montréal* provides a glimpse into the deterioration of occupational health and safety conditions in Quebec, including a reduction in interventions by the CNESST, based on the FTQ analysis. The annual number of occupational injuries, which includes work-related accidents and illnesses, climbed from 90,414 in 2016 to 110,038 in 2020. The number of work-related accidents increased from 82,179 to 94,750, while the number of occupational diseases rose from 8,235 to 15,288. The number of work-related fatalities has remained a constant, at around 200 annually.

Meanwhile, CNESST interventions to protect workers' health have decreased. According to the article, in 2020 the CNESST delivered 1,772 violation notices, the lowest in years, while between 2016 and 2019, they averaged around 3,600. This means that the CNESST let its guard down as the pandemic hit and problems were at their worst.



The article quotes an FTQ prevention representative at the REM (Réseau express métropolitain) construction site, the new light rail transit line that will cross the Greater Montreal area. She said:

"It's becoming more and more dangerous. The work must be done quickly. Companies are functioning based on bonuses, so health and safety don't seem to be a priority for them. Workers are not filing complaints and when they do decide to, inspectors are not showing up. They just call and wait for the pictures taken by the superintendent."

Workers in the mining sector confirm that the CNESST has reduced its inspection activities over the years, its issuance of violation notices to companies that lead to fines, and its notices of non-compliance that result in corrective orders for failure to comply with health and safety standards. In conversation with *Worker's Forum*, one of them said that big employers are constantly pressuring the CNESST not to intervene against them, and that CNESST management is pressuring its inspectors not to issue notices of wrongdoing and orders to companies to take corrective action.

This is a very serious problem facing workers and it will be further exacerbated by Bill 59, *An Act to modernize the occupational health and safety regime*, which was passed on September 30 by the Quebec government despite strong opposition from workers, unions and injured worker organizations.

This law hands over unilateral decision-making power in health and safety matters to narrow private interests. Within that context, it grants enormous regulatory powers to the CNESST, particularly in the areas of recognition of what constitutes an occupational disease, medical assistance to injured and sick workers, return to work, compensation, and prevention mechanisms. The CNESST, which is already not doing its job, will be able to bring in and withdraw regulations at will, without public scrutiny, and without even the National Assembly being informed.

All of this is absolutely contrary to a pro-social and modern way of dealing with workers' health and safety issues, which requires that workers' say be decisive in determining what is healthy and safe at the workplace and what is just treatment for workers injured or made ill on the job.

This only heightens the awareness amongst workers of the urgency of stepping up their fight against these violations of their rights.



Arts and Entertainment Workers Fighting for Their Rights

Animation Workers Sign New Contracts



On September 24, animation workers at Titmouse Vancouver signed their first union contract with

IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees).

This is only the second collective agreement signed by animation workers in Canada with Oasis Animation Workers Union in Montreal having signed their contract in November, 2019 with Oasis Animation. The union is a member of CSN (Confederation des Syndicats Nationaux).

Oasis union President Tamarind King said, "Salaries will improve and there will be annual raises. Even as the country's animation production booms, labour conditions remain poor. There is a lack of job security and prevalence of unpaid overtime. Some Canadian studios still pay animators by the frame, a sweatshop tactic that is also common in Asia, which means animators are not paid for overtime and often have to work crunch hours just to make a living wage."

There are 70,000 animation workers in Canada with Vancouver being the centre of animation production with over 60 studios and one of the biggest animation centres in the world. Big Bad Boo is the largest animation company in Canada. Ontario has a \$200 million dollar a year industry.

The Titmouse agreement will cover approximately 200 workers and is the first-ever contract for the recently chartered Animation Guild, IATSE Local 938.

The world's largest animation companies are Pixar U.S., (subsidiary of Disney); Walt Disney, U.S.; Studio Ghibli, Japanese, (Disney); Dreamworks, (owned by Reliance Entertainment Pvt Ltd) India; Nickelodeon, U.S.; Aardman, UK.

Highlights of the four-year Titmouse agreement include defined overtime procedures, increased wage minimums, improved annual wage increases, a 15 per cent premium for employees taking on supervisory duties, increased sick/personal days (and the ability to take half-days), and enhanced RRSPs with a lower fee structure. "There are real gains for everyone in this agreement," remarked Emily Gossmann, IATSE Local 938 Senior Steward and member of the bargaining committee, adding "these gains will be backed by the strong representation that the IATSE provides."

"The IATSE is proud to have these talented workers within our ranks," said IATSE International President Matthew D. Loeb, "and thrilled that they can now begin to experience similar benefits and protections to those long enjoyed by the IATSE-represented animation workers in Los Angeles."

(Photos: IATSE 938)



Film and Television Workers in the United States Demand a Fair Deal

Sixty thousand behind-the-scenes film and TV workers in the United States who are represented by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States, Its Territories and Canada (IATSE) are mobilizing to ensure Hollywood studios and streaming companies provide the crews who produce their content with reasonable rest, sustainable benefits, and living wages.



Action by IATSE members in Burbank, California, October 3, 2021

After months of negotiating successor contracts to the Producer-IATSE Basic Agreement and the Theatrical and Television Motion Picture Area Standards Agreement, the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), which represents major film and television production companies, announced it does not intend to make any counter-offer to IATSE's most recent proposal. In response, IATSE obtained a massive strike vote with 89.66 per cent turnout -- 53,411 total votes, and a 98.68 per cent yes vote -- 52,706 yes votes.

IATSE reports that throughout the bargaining process, the AMPTP "has failed to work with us on addressing the most grievous problems in their workplaces, including:

- Excessively unsafe and harmful working hours.
- Unlivable wages for the lowest paid crafts.
- Consistent failure to provide reasonable rest during meal breaks, between workdays, and on weekends.
- Workers on certain "new media" streaming projects getting paid less, even on productions with budgets that rival or exceed those of traditionally released blockbusters."



IATSE points out that the AMPTP is "an ensemble that includes media mega-corporations collectively worth trillions of dollars." It does not accept its claims that "it cannot provide behind-the-scenes crews with basic human necessities like adequate sleep, meal breaks, and living wages. Worse, management does not appear to even recognize our core issues as problems that exist in the first place."

IATSE says, "These issues are real for the workers in our industry, and change is long overdue. However, the explosion of streaming combined with the pandemic has elevated and aggravated working conditions, bringing 60,000 behind-the-scenes workers covered by these contracts to a breaking point. We risked our health and safety all

year, working through the pandemic to ensure that our business emerged intact. Now, we cannot and will not accept a deal that leaves us with an unsustainable outcome."

IATSE was founded in 1893 when representatives of stagehands working in eleven cities met in New York and pledged to support each other's efforts to establish fair wages and working conditions for their members. Today it works in all forms of live theater, motion picture and television production, trade shows and exhibitions, television broadcasting, and concerts as well as the equipment and construction shops that support all these areas of the entertainment industry.

IATSE says, "We are more than 150,000 workers strong in virtually all arts, media, and entertainment crafts, and our mission is to improve all entertainment workers' lives both inside and outside the workplace."



(Photos: IATSE, C. Fiorini)



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Website: www.cpcml.ca Email: office@cpcml.ca