

March 21, 2023 - No. 15

Worthy Fight for the Dignity of Labour
Windsor Salt Workers Hold the Line



Salt workers and supporters rally at Windsor City Hall, March 16, 2023.

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Worthy Fight for the Dignity of Labour

Windsor Salt Workers Hold the Line



International Women's Day rally at Windsor Salt picketline supports striking workers, March 8, 2023.

Workers at Windsor Salt in Windsor, Ontario are entering their fifth week on strike. By now, the company is clear that the workers' *No means No!* when it comes to union-busting through contracting out, and the company has agreed to return to negotiations which will resume on Wednesday, March 22. Despite this, the workers say they harbour no illusions that the company will stop dictating concessions.

Despite indications in the joint statement the union issued with the company which says conditions exist to come to an agreement, there is no public confirmation that the company has backed down demanding concessions. Nonetheless, since it was revealed that the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) is an investor in Stone Canyon Industries Holdings Inc., which owns Windsor Salt, and after the president of Unifor sent a letter to the OTPP urging it to get the company to negotiate, the tone of the company lawyer has undergone an 180 degree about face and he is now playing good cop, not bad cop. In other words, the company has been forced to change tack.



Workers all over the U.S. with experience with operations owned by Stone Canyon are writing to the Windsor workers about what is happening in Windsor and the role of the teachers' pension fund. They are sharing the experience of what many have gone through in negotiations with Stone Canyon, their law firm Jackson Lewis and their lead lawyer, and are following what happens in Windsor closely.

(EmpowerYourselfNow.ca. Photos: WF, EYN.)



Salt Miners in Pugwash, Nova Scotia Support Striking Windsor Salt Workers

Empower Yourself Now spoke with a worker in Pugwash, Nova Scotia with first-hand experience of what Stone Canyon Industries Holdings Inc., the owners of Windsor Salt, did to the Windsor Salt miners in Pugwash. The holding company bought Windsor Salt in 2021 at which time the Pugwash workers were bargaining a new collective agreement.

"From the time bargaining started it was clear the company had no intentions of actually negotiating although there was a lot of talking. From the start, the company had hired a U.S. anti-union firm Cozen O'Connor and brought in a known anti-union lawyer from Halifax and came to the union with [demands for] crazy concessions. Over the months of negotiations they backed off a few but at the end of the day still had plenty. They never really wanted to deal with any issues the union had.

"Right from the start the union just wanted someone in the company to actually hear their concerns. The union could not understand the company's actions as their asks were not out of this world. So they finally got their corporate lawyer from the U.S. to come in and change tone and 'listen,' but still nothing changed. They had their agenda, which seemed to be to cause a strike and try to break the union as much as they could, no matter the cost.

"They spent millions of dollars trying to intimidate -- bringing bulk salt in by boat from their other mines to Halifax and Summerside, PEI to show the workers that they did not need Pugwash salt. They also installed fencing and cameras all around the site, and trained company people to do essential union jobs. Along with violating labour law by sending the members letters about their proposals, how fair they were, and basically how the union executive were lying to [the workers].

"The strike at Pugwash in the end only lasted for two weeks. The reason for this is not because the workers got what they needed, but because a couple days after they rejected the company's offer and went out, the company sent everyone an intimidating letter that their offer was still good for two weeks and after that it would get worse. This intimidated enough people and they went around the union and asked to vote on the original agreement again and it passed.

"As for concessions, the existing contract didn't have great language around contracting out, so there wasn't much to take there compared to what the union in Windsor [Ontario] has. They already get maintenance contractors all the time and have them doing other work from time to time that used to be union work. The new contract is full of little language changes that essentially take away rights around time-off, cancellation of shifts etc. In other words, there wasn't really one huge thing that they were taking like the contracting out in Windsor. A big concession the company took though was they didn't pay retro pay and removed this language from the agreement. Some other concessions were that they made it so people can waive any vacation over the minimum labour law... which reduces workforce. They also combined some job classifications, which has led to job eliminations."

"I hope that this will help the workers in Windsor and we are following what happens there with interest."

(EmpowerYourselfNow.ca)



Information on Stone Canyon's Closure of Salt Production in Alberta



Mine in Lindbergh, Alberta

In August 2022, Windsor Salt's new owners, Stone Canyon Industries Holdings Inc., shut down a salt mine operation near the hamlet of Lindbergh, Alberta -- 235 kilometres northeast of Edmonton. This eliminated the jobs of 47 people but affected everyone in town because when the mine there opened in 1948, Lindbergh was set up as a company town. The hamlet was supplied with natural gas from wells at the mine, as well as electricity and water treatment.

The operation was built on top of a natural salt deposit that was found while prospecting for oil and gas. Through evaporation it produced table salt, water softener, agricultural salt (used to deliver vital trace minerals to livestock) and ice melt (used for melting snow and ice on roads and sidewalks) using a high-pressure brine solution. Once extracted from the wells, evaporation removes the water from the brine to produce high-purity salt similar to what is produced at the evaporation plant in Windsor, Ontario where workers are currently on strike. The products were used in Alberta and Saskatchewan, with some also going to Ontario.

Stone Canyon purchased K+S Americas Salt in 2021, which gave it ownership over the Lindbergh operations under the brand Morton Salt, which owned Windsor Salt. At the time Stone Canyon closed the Alberta line it said it was the result of "financial matters." It said that the facility was not "profitable" and announced its plan to tear down the closed building that housed the operations. However, the main issue was that the new owners did not want to make the investments necessary to upgrade the gas wells and equipment. Neither the company nor the government of Alberta cared a chit about the workers or the town.

The relations -- built up over the 74 years of operations -- including the building of the hamlet where many workers lived, were subject to destruction at the hands of Stone Canyon Industries Holdings Inc., in its global plans to consolidate the salt industry under its control. The likely aim was to flip the company to a new buyer, having eliminated parts that were deemed "unprofitable." Workers and their communities are turned into things

that can just be disposed of as part of global schemes outside of their control.

The truth of the matter is that whether or not certain operations are profitable is not the main consideration when holding companies wreck production facilities and governments permit business decisions of large U.S. or other foreign cartels to decide the fate of Canadians. If they want to invest in Canadian natural resources it must be done in a manner that favours Canada and its workers and communities. Otherwise they should be asked to leave and their operations brought under the control of those who can make decisions which activate the human factor/social consciousness and uphold the aim of developing the economy for the public good, not nation-wrecking based on rapacious self-interest.



Lindbergh salt mine in 1949, a year after it started production.

(EmpowerYourselfNow.ca. Photos: V. Brooker, MacLennan family)



Resistance in the U.S. to Anti-Labour Laws

**U.S. Educators Develop Creative Ways to Uphold
Their Rights and the Rights of All**

– Education is a Right Podcast –



EP 167
**U.S. Educators Organizing in
Spite of Anti-Union Laws**

In this episode, *Education is a Right* speaks with Jon Shelton, Vice-President of Higher

Education of the American Federation of Teachers-Wisconsin, about organizing in public K-12 and post-secondary education in the face of anti-union, anti-worker "right-to-work" laws. They also discuss the dirty role that anti-union law firms like Jackson Lewis are playing in the U.S. amidst a wave of a new generation of young workers organizing their workplaces. These firms are also trying to make inroads into Canada but are facing stiff resistance from workers and educators here as well.

To listen to the podcast [click here](#).



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