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*Empower Yourself Now* reports that the strike at Windsor Salt in Windsor, Ontario is now entering its 15th week with all indications that negotiations between the company and the unions -- Unifor Locals 1959 and 240 -- are not progressing. Windsor Salt's owners continue to come and go as they please, flaunting that they are in charge. If their message is that the workers have no choice but to agree to whatever they are demanding or they can walk the picket lines until the cows come home, the workers are not impressed. In a show of strength, the company is bringing trucks in and out of

the evaporation plant but the workers are reliably informed that these trucks are for show. They carry little to no product in or out of the plant.

On May 31, the contract of U.S. salt workers at Morton Salt in Silver Springs, New York expires. The salt workers in Canada are fully aware that the company may use this to threaten either contingent of workers that they had better settle or their counterparts at other plants will be getting lots of overtime to make up for the interruption of production in either plant. The company has not withdrawn its demand that the workers submit to permission to contract-out and changes to contract language that will degrade the workers' union.

Windsor Salt and Morton Salt are both owned by U.S.-based Stone Canyon Industries Holdings Inc. Morton Salt's anti-union lawyer either quit or was fired from the notorious anti-union law firm Jackson Lewis sometime in March, but has been brought on at Morton Salt to run its union-busting "in-house." At one point the company claimed that it could not negotiate while the company was engaged in training managers in mine rescue to keep production going. Most recently, the company said it couldn't negotiate while the company investigated an alleged incident at the plant which it insinuated the workers were involved in, offering a \$50,000 reward for information.



From the get-go, the *modus operandi* of the company and its lawyer has been to use any excuse to intimidate, pressure and bluff. They seem to think that the workers and/or their union will give up their resistance to union-busting through contracting out. It hasn't worked yet and the more experience the workers get with it, the more inoculated they become to the company's antics.

The workers directly verified that the private investigators (PIs) hired, by nobody knows who for sure, to "investigate" an alleged assault the company states took place at the mine and dangle a \$50,000 reward for information, were in fact a mechanism to intimidate and test the morale of individual workers. Workers report that in some cases when the PIs have visited homes and found no one there, they have not returned to do their "investigation." In other cases, they have "visited" workers more than once, probably to sow doubt in their integrity or intimidate them. The workers are clear that based on the actions of the PIs, that if they were in fact hired by the company, either directly or indirectly through another party, it would amount to strike-breaking and strike-related misconduct, which is illegal. They are also aware that the company has no legal right to hand over workers' addresses to a third party for the purpose of strike-breaking. To do so violates Canada's privacy laws.

Workers have engaged with the PIs to tell them that they should be investigating the company if they want to know what happened in the alleged incident. When that happens, most often, the PIs have asked no further questions. In at least one case, when the PIs were told to investigate the company, they said that it was not the first time they had been told that! This reflects the unity of the workers in rejecting efforts to paint them as thugs in an attempt to divide their ranks and undermine the strike.

The company's stage-managed shenanigans would be laughable if its approach and aim were not destructive to Canada's economy and its work force. Workers have been out of work for 100 days, deprived of their wages while the company is spending millions on 24/7 security guards, surveillance and to pay for empty transport trucks, while over a hundred millions dollars are estimated to have been lost in production. All of this money is spent to break the union instead of expanding production according to the permission it has received from the City of Windsor for

more brine wells and adding a new level to the rock salt mine.

The workers inform that the company continues to build the expanded brine wells by bringing in the important steel pipes this requires. In the opinion of several workers spoken with on the picket lines, this indicates that the company does want to expand production. They are nonetheless clear that the intention of the company has nothing to do with producing salt but to break the union so that it can do whatever it wishes. The workers also point out that with the way laws in Canada are skewed to serve the interests of the rich, it is quite possible the company will write off any losses from the strike to get tax breaks!

Salt workers report that they are coming to the conclusion that governments at all levels must be held to account for their silence which emboldens the company. They must also be impelled to intervene to limit the destructive activities of the company, rather than the ability of the workers to stop strike-breaking activities on the part of the company.



Discussion on the picket lines is very vigorous. Besides other matters of concern, workers and members of the community and fellow workers from other sectors of the economy are constantly discussing their working conditions and how to deal with the neo-liberal anti-social offensive. In the case of the salt workers, discussion also centres on how to defend their interests until they are back at work and when they are back at work. They report that prior to the strike, the company used overtime as a way to avoid hiring new workers. Shortly before the strike, when the workers had a sense something was up, it started

limiting overtime to prevent the company stockpiling salt to be used against them in the event of a strike. Workers are also realizing that overtime has become prevalent -- used especially during the pandemic when it was on an emergency basis -- and that it is not acceptable that it be permitted to become the new normal. More workers should be hired who can join the union in all sectors of the economy, they say, including education and health care.

Salt workers are clear that the company wants to address the shortfall in workers not by hiring more unionized workers, but through contracting out work. The company self-servingly justifies this by claiming that the workers either don't have the sufficient skill set or there are not enough "available" workers or the extra workers are not required enough of the time to warrant hiring full-time workers. If the company does not win on contracting out, it can still abuse overtime by penalizing workers in various ways if they refuse overtime. The workers are recognizing that it is important for them to organize how overtime is done so that it cannot be used against them, at the expense of their families as well as their health and safety. Like all workers, they want to have sustainable and stable working conditions that expand employment and contribute to a safer working environment for everyone.

The discussions on the line and the experiences with the PIs show that the workers have confidence that their stand to defend their union is the right one. Their conviction is strengthened as they come to terms with the refusal of the company to respect them and their work and instead treat them with contempt, as if they are disposable. They are clear that their security lies in defending the rights of all, not in letting the arrogant U.S. owners of Windsor Salt dictate their lives.

*Workers' Forum* calls on everyone to step up support for the Windsor Salt workers.



# Windsor-Essex Teachers Step Up Their Support for Striking Salt Workers



Retired teachers on Windsor Salt picket line, May 18, 2023.

Two motions of significance to the Windsor salt workers strike were passed unanimously on May 24 at the annual meeting of the Teachers' Bargaining Unit of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, District 9 (OSSTF D9 - Windsor Essex. Both resolutions show the growing support for the salt workers amongst teachers, whose pension funds are invested in Stone Canyon Industries Holdings Inc.

One motion was for the bargaining unit to advocate that the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan (OTPP) divest from Stone Canyon. This is a significant development because it is the result of all the teachers' unions in Windsor-Essex, along with teachers across Ontario, having publicly called on the OTPP to use their investments in Stone Canyon to pressure the company to give up its union-busting tactics. The company has seen fit to ignore them and has not changed course. The teachers of OSSTF D9 are now making it clear they want their pension funds divested from companies that engage in such anti-union activities.

The other motion encourages bargaining unit branches – every public high school in Windsor and Essex County – to financially support the striking salt workers by collecting donations.

Teachers in Windsor-Essex are uniting with the salt workers in action -- showing what values they uphold and which they don't. Their stands are very much appreciated by the workers on the line, many of whose family members are either students or teachers.



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## No to "Contract Flipping" and Union-Busting Stand with the Alberta Wapasu Creek Lodge Workers!

– Peggy Morton –

On April 13, four hundred workers represented by United Food and Commercial Workers Local 401 at the Wapasu Creek Lodge, a massive 5,174-room work camp north of Fort McMurray, were issued layoff notices after voting 95 per cent to reject the employer Civeo's demands for 20 per cent

cuts to wages, clawbacks of benefits, deep cuts to guaranteed hours, and a variety of cutbacks on basic support Wapasu workers need to do their jobs. The demands from the company come two years into a three-and-a-half-year contract.



The workers provide food, housekeeping, reception and front desk services, maintenance, and security for the facility which houses and feeds workers from remote oil sands projects, including the Imperial Oil Kearl Lake oil sands mine. The workers kept the camps operating through the pandemic, under the most difficult conditions. The workers point out that major projects like Kearl Lake, with a production capacity of 263,000 barrels/day of bitumen, cannot operate without Wapasu. Not only does it house the fly-in/fly-out workforce at Kearl Lake and other projects but also the workforce for the annual turnarounds/shutdowns which are now underway to carry out maintenance. They do all that is necessary to keep the work camps functioning, but the arrogant Texas-based monopoly has now decided to dispose of them in order to deprive workers of the wages and working conditions they have established. To do this, Civeo plans to contract out the management and operation of the lodge to Aramark.

The union filed an unfair labour practices complaint with the Alberta Labour Relations Board (ALRB) on December 2, after the company demanded concessions while a collective agreement was in place. When the workers said *No!* and were served with layoff notices, the union filed applications for interim relief and a true/common employer and/or successor declaration on April 27. The first would stop the layoffs until the entire case was heard, and the second would establish that Civeo remained the actual employer, or that successor rights existed and the collective agreement would remain in place. Local 401 also filed for access to the worksite.

The hearing on the April 27 application for interim relief began on May 16. On day two, when only two of 25 expected witnesses from the union had been heard, Civeo put forward a motion to summarily dismiss the union's application, and the ALRB agreed. The ALRB then declared that there was no available time to continue the hearing prior to June 8 when the workers will be laid off. The union's full submission will not even be heard until August, two months after the notorious global privatizing profiteer Aramark has been installed as the new employer. Until then the workers must find new ways of affirming their rights as it is clear that the Labour Relations Board cannot be relied on to do it for them.

The ALRB ignored as irrelevant the fact that a company whose sole business is the ownership and operation of work camps would be contracting out its business to a competitor. Nevermind that in 2016, when the NDP was in power in Alberta, Civeo did the same thing when it demanded a 44 per cent wage cut from the 170 workers at Beaver River Lodge, which the workers also refused. Civeo

then laid everyone off under a fraudulent "contract flip" where it rebranded itself as a new company, and contracted the work out to itself, replacing the workers with low-paid non-union workers. The ALRB did not even wait until Local 401 had put forward its case to make its decision.

In its decision, the ALRB stated that it only has authority to grant orders which are "preservative," not "remedial" and that to grant the union's application would be "remedial."

*Webster's Online Dictionary* provides these definitions: "Remedial: Affording a remedy; intended for a remedy or for the removal of an evil: as, to adopt remedial measures; tending to cure or restore to health." "Preserve" is defined in the *Oxford Dictionary* as: "to maintain (something) in its original or existing state."

Local 401's applications to the ALRB were precisely to preserve what the workers have established in the form of their union, collective agreement and standards. Many of the workers at Wapasu have worked there for many years. They fought to organize themselves and establish wages, working conditions and benefits acceptable to them. The Indigenous workers fought to uphold their rights including a space to conduct ceremony and other recognition. Granting the interim relief application would mean they would keep their jobs and preserve the wages and working conditions they have accomplished with their union. However, the ALRB has made its order based on precedents established by successive governments. These affirm self-serving interests of the monopolies to do as they please while the workers are limited by juridical rulings which are bad for the workers who do the work, bad for the workers the camps serve and bad for society itself.



The ALRB's refusal of the application for interim relief sets the stage for the board to also find that the "new contractor," whoever that may be, will not be bound by the collective agreement, obligated to retain the workers, or do anything else to preserve their livelihoods and uphold their rights.

This is something which brings utmost shame to Canada and the claims of governments to protect rights and not permit forms of human trafficking. Of course, governments are not just at the disposal of the narrow private interests which dare treat labour in this manner. They have in fact been taken over by these narrow private interests and spend their time passing laws to let these interests act with impunity, on one hand, and limit the workers to not being able to do anything about it.

Taking collective action to end this state of affairs has become the greatest challenge facing the workers' movement, especially when some of the union leaders concur with the governments in question by saying that serving these narrow private interests is needed to preserve jobs, attract investment, and the like. It is also the case that unions are being attacked and either gotten rid of or exchanged for organizations formed by the employers to keep the workers divided and in line. Legally protected anti-worker practices have become increasingly blatant. A modern society requires new ways of mobilizing and organizing in a manner that favours the workers. There is no option but to take this up. Local 401 has been mobilizing the workers who live in the camps to join the fight, to stand as one and not permit the vicious attack on the workers who make sure the camps run smoothly and also according to public health requirements which is a big issue when thousands of people are in and out of work camps.

When the security of the workers who run the camps is so deeply impacted, this directly affects the workers who live in the camps. They will also be severely negatively impacted. Life is hard enough living in isolation in the wilderness without also having to contend with the inevitable decline in the standards at the camp when the workers with years of experience are tossed out on the street.

***Uphold the Dignity of Labour!  
Our Security Lies in the Fight for the Rights of All!***



**Information picket, April 26, 2023, in front of Imperial Oil office in Calgary opposing firing of workers at work camp that houses workers from Imperial Oil's Kearl Lake oil sands operation.**



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## **Information on Civeo**

Civeo calls itself "Workforce Accommodations and Hospitality Specialists." It is a Texas-based monopoly which owns and operates 20 work camps (or what the company calls lodges) in Alberta -- 17 of which are in the Athabasca oil sands region, as well as camps in Australia and the U.S. Canada is Civeo's major source of revenue. Civeo also runs camps owned by the oil sands monopolies, or mining companies in Australia, where it contracts to provide services. It also sets up temporary camps at major construction sites such as the Coastal GasLink pipeline.

Civeo was originally a Canadian company, formed in the Peace River area in 1977 as PTI Group to rent out mobile offices and dormitories. It later added catering and housekeeping services.

In 2001, PTI Group was acquired by Oil States International, Inc. of Houston.

The Oil States International Inc. (OSII) website states that the corporation "is a global provider of manufactured products and services used in the drilling, completion, subsea, production and infrastructure sectors of the oil and natural gas industry, as well as in the industrial and military sectors. The company's manufactured products include highly engineered capital equipment as well as products consumed in the drilling, well construction and production of oil and natural gas." The company also acquired a significant share of work camps or lodges housing workers at remote oil, gas, pipeline construction and mining sites, both permanent and temporary modular housing.

In 2014, OSII spun off its accommodation business as Civeo, carrying out what it called a "self-directed redomesticating," moving Civeo's headquarters to Calgary in order to take advantage of lower

tax rates in Canada. "Redomiciling" is a measure permitted by the U.S. tax code for companies that do most of their business in a foreign jurisdiction.

Since that time, Civeo has aggressively expanded its share of the market for housing workers at remote sites. In 2018 Civeo purchased Noralta Lodge, one of Alberta's major oil sands accommodation companies for \$367 million. Noralta had 11 lodges comprised of over 5,700 owned rooms and 7,900 total rooms. Civeo has also expanded its presence in Australia, acquiring Action Industrial Catering in 2019 as well as new contracts to operate a 1,540-room facility for an unnamed oil sands operator in Alberta, as well as new contracts in Australian mining camps.

Civeo now controls about 30 per cent of all work camp facilities measured by rooms, while its competitors together have about one-third, and the rest is owned by the monopolies and cartels operating in the oil and gas and mining sectors.



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