

July 19, 2023 - No. 38

BC Port Workers Resume Strike
State-Organized Attack on BC Port Workers



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BC Port Workers Resume Strike

State-Organized Attack on BC Port Workers

BC port worker picket lines were reestablished throughout the coast late Tuesday afternoon closing down the ports once again. Subsequently the port owners applied to the Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) to declare the renewal of the strike to be a completely new strike requiring 72 hours notice. The CIRB agreed, declared the renewed strike illegal and ordered the Port workers back to work.

The proposed contract, which was rejected by the leading Canadian caucus of the union, is not a negotiated settlement. It comes directly from the government mediator. The big business spokespeople and mass media have gone into overdrive demanding the Trudeau government recall Parliament and pass legislation criminalizing the strike and imposing the mediator's contract.



Dockworkers' picket lines go back up in Vancouver, July 18, 2023

The ILWU Canada had paused the strike to assess the mediator's report, which all had hoped would be sufficient. It did not meet their expectations and the strike was renewed. Rob Ashton, president of International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Canada, issued a news release on July 18 which explained why ILWU Canada Longshore Division voted down the mediators recommended terms of settlement. He stated:

"The ILWU Canada Longshore Caucus does not believe the recommendations had the ability to protect our jobs now or into the future. Our position since day one has been to protect our jurisdiction and this position has not changed.

"With the record profits that the BC Maritime Employers Association's member companies have earned over the last few years, the employers have not addressed the cost of living issues that our workers have faced over the last couple of years, as all workers have.

"The term of the collective agreement that was given with today's uncertain times is far too long. We must be able to re-address the uncertainty in the world's financial markets for our members."

In response to the renewal of the strike, various state agencies, business groups and monopoly media have gone out of their way to attack the workers issuing all kinds of threats and demands. Federal Labour Minister Seamus O'Regan jumped on the anti-worker bandwagon echoing the CIRB declaration criminalizing the renewal of the strike. The state-organized attack criminalizing port workers is what the Chamber of Commerce and other big business groups, monopoly media and certain anti-worker government leaders have been demanding from the start of the strike.

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Canada has now issued a 72-hour strike notice putting them in a position to resume their strike action as of 9:00 am PT Saturday, July 22.

The working class and its allies denounce the shallow ploy to manipulate the mediator's intervention into something it is not meant to be. The mediator's report was issued as a proposal for assessment by the employees and employers. The issuance of the report did not end the strike. Only a decision by both sides to accept the report as a collective agreement would have ended the strike. The port workers have rejected the report and the strike will continue until they achieve a positive outcome.

This state-organized attack must not be allowed to pass. The proper and just way to stop the strike is for the employers to offer port workers a contract that meets their three main demands: adjust

wages to deal with price inflation, stop contracting out their work, and allow workers a say and control over the introduction of automation.



Strike at National Steel Car in Hamilton

Stand with Striking Rail Car Workers



July 6 rally at National Steel Car in Hamilton



A rally was held July 6 at the National Steel Car picket line in Hamilton in support of the 1,450 workers who have been on strike, shutting down production at the plant since June 29. The striking workers were joined for the rally by members of United Steelworkers Local 1005 and other Hamilton steelworker locals, the Hamilton and District Labour Council, the Canadian Labour Congress and the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada. Workers from other United Steelworker locals have been regularly visiting the picket lines to support the workers in their just demands.

The two main issues in the strike are improved safety conditions at the workplace, and a wage increase and cost-of-living adjustment that will compensate for the rapidly increasing cost of living. As of the date of the rally, negotiations were stalled as the company refused to return to the bargaining table.

The right to safety at work is a big concern for workers at the plant, as the company has had a long history of unsafe working conditions. Recently, in less than two years from September 2020 to June 2022, three workers were killed on the job at the rail car manufacturer. Workers held a rally outside the plant in June 2022 after the death of Quoc Le, a welder, to demand measures be taken to end the unsafe working conditions. At that time workers described hazardous working conditions at the plant, where production goes at a hectic pace with employee safety appearing to take a back seat, placing the onus on workers to "watch their own backs" in order to stay safe. Among other measures the union is negotiating for more full-time union representatives in the plant to deal with safety and other matters.



Toronto Steelworkers' Area Council visits picket line, July 13, 2023

The last wage offer by the company for a three-year agreement was for wage increases of four per cent the first year and three per cent each year for the following two years. The union had asked for seven per cent per year. Pointing to the need for a sizable wage increase to deal with inflation, President of USW Local 7135 Frank Crowder said that a lot of workers at the plant travel to work from Niagara and Welland, and given current wages and the amount they have to spend on gas, they might as well find a minimum wage job closer to where they live.

National Steel Car is the largest manufacturer of railway cars in Canada. The rail cars built at the Hamilton plant transport critical products, including food and fuel, across the country, and the company's order books are full. The company signed a contract in November 2022 to produce 1,300 specialized cars for Canpotex Limited for shipping potash and another recent contract of similar size was signed for the production of grain cars for CN Rail.



Above USW Local 1005 brings solidarity and financial support in a visit to the picket line on July 14. The day after the strike began USW Local 1005 stated "USW LOCAL 1005 stands in strong solidarity with our sisters and brothers at USW 7135 who voted to strike for better wages, safety, security and dignity. National Steel Car must start negotiating instead of dictating!"

(Photos: USW Local 1005, USW Toronto Area Council, R. Wyman)



Negotiations in K-12 Education in Ontario

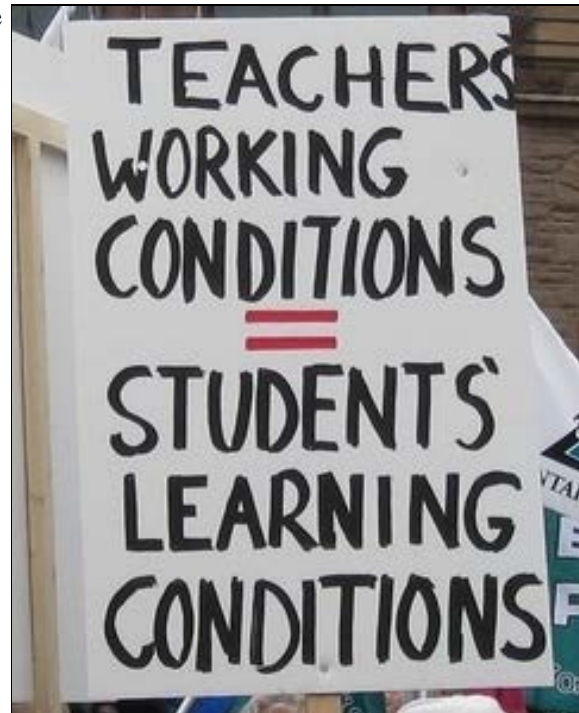
Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Ontario Teachers' Federation

From August 20-21, the Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) will take place at the Westin Harbour Castle, Toronto, Ontario. The Board of Governors is made up of executives and elected Governors from each of the affiliated unions of the OTF which represent all teachers employed in the publicly funded education system in Ontario as well as certain designated private schools or designated organizations. The OTF was established by the government of Ontario's *Teaching Profession Act*. According to the Act the purposes of the Federation are:

- a) to promote and advance the cause of education;
- b) to raise the status of the teaching profession;
- c) to promote and advance the interests of teachers and to secure conditions that will make possible the best professional service;
- d) to arouse and increase public interest in educational affairs;
- e) to cooperate with other teachers' organizations throughout the world having the same or like objects; and
- f) to represent all members of the pension plan established under the *Teachers' Pension Act* in the administration of the plan and the management of the pension fund.

All teachers employed by a school board or one of the designated entities in Ontario are members of the OTF and pay an annual membership fee for its operations. The OTF plays an important role of bringing together the members of all its affiliated unions to discuss common concerns and work together on shared matters such as the state of education and the investments of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan.

This year the OTF annual meeting will take place in the context of the refusal of the Ontario government to negotiate with Ontario's teachers and education workers and instead to make significant changes to the system arbitrarily through legislation and regulations. This includes changes to the powers and duties of school boards, the context of education and high school graduation requirements. Contracts with the province's teachers and education workers expired August 31, 2022 and they have been working under the provisions of their expired collective agreements since that time. To date negotiations have been proceeding at a snail's pace as a result of the refusal of the government to address the fundamental issues of underfunding of education and the resulting deterioration of working and learning conditions in schools, as well as its dictate of changes to the system as a whole.



Only education workers in CUPE's Ontario School Board Council of Unions have come to an

agreement with the province following their political protests in November which forced the government to back down on its dictate and attempt to invoke the notwithstanding clause of the Constitution to impose a contract through legislation without the workers' agreement. At this point the unions still involved in central negotiations with the government have not taken strike votes which would put them in a position to carry out strike action. Occurring just two weeks before the scheduled start of school, the meeting will be an opportunity for the OTF affiliate unions to put in place arrangements to prevent their ranks from being divided in the coming year as the government will no doubt attempt to pit one section of teachers against another to avoid facing a united front of teachers and education workers in these negotiations like it faced during the successful CUPE strike.

Another significant matter of concern of affiliate unions and members of the OTF across Ontario is the investments of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Fund in Stone Canyon Industries Holdings Inc. All four teaching affiliates in Windsor-Essex and all the provincial Presidents of the teaching affiliates have raised the matter with the Pension Plan and have either been ignored or received justifications for why the Plan cannot do anything. One of the objectives of the Federation, as defined in the law which established it, is "to represent all members of the pension plan established under the *Teachers' Pension Act* in the administration of the plan and the management of the pension fund." Additionally, the same Act mandates that "the Board of Governors shall meet annually and confer with the Minister and the senior officials of the Ministry on matters touching and concerning the objects of the Federation."

The Ministry of Education along with the OTF as joint sponsors appoint representatives to oversee the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan. As such, the issue of the fund's investments in a U.S. holding company engaged in union-busting across Canada and refusing to negotiate is an issue the Federation is duty-bound to address with the Pension Plan and the Ontario government, both in terms of the demands of the affiliate members and the Plan's own mandate. By taking this matter up at its AGM the OTF will also be making it clear to the Ford government that whether it concerns its own members or other workers, the OTF stands opposed to attempts to dictate and weaken unions that defend their members' working conditions, which are the learning and living conditions of the entire society.



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