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**Upholding the Dignity of Labour**  
**Windsor Salt Workers Ratify Tentative**  
**Agreements**



**One of three Windsor Salt workers' ratification meetings, August 27, 2023.**

After six months on strike, workers at Windsor Salt in Windsor, Ontario, have ratified collective agreements.

Congratulations to the workers and their unions for holding the line, upholding the dignity of labour and realizing their demands despite the difficulties they faced. Congratulations also go out to all those who contributed to the strike and supported the workers in a myriad of different ways from Windsor-Essex, the teachers across Ontario, fellow salt workers from Goderich, Pugwash, Iles de la Madeleine and even internationally, as well as workers from different sectors of the economy and unions in Quebec, Hamilton, Toronto, southwestern and southern and northern Ontario and across the country as well as the United States. It was a magnificent example of solidarity, day after day after day for six months, permitting the salt workers both materially and morally and in terms of human support to reaffirm their convictions and hold the line.

At the Ojibway Mine, production workers voted 69 per cent in favour, while maintenance workers voted 79 per cent in favour. At the evaporation plant, 97 per cent of production workers voted in favour, while 86 per cent of skilled trades voted in favour. Clerical and lab workers, represented by Unifor Local 240, voted 100 per cent in favour.

The workers report that the spirit at the ratification meetings was uplifting, with workers proud of what they had been able to accomplish in terms of defending their wages and working conditions and the unity they forged with one another. In particular, appreciation was expressed for the clerical and evaporation workers who, despite not having the same union-busting demands in their first tentative agreements as the miners, paused their votes, which they were required to hold according

to labour law. They did so in order to bide time for a way forward to be found. This was greatly appreciated by the miners who the company was targeting, while at the same time trying to divide the workers' ranks. This didn't work because the clerical and evaporation workers took a principled stand which favoured the entire collective work force.

Workers at the evaporation facility reportedly re-start work on August 28, while workers at the Ojibway Mine will return for one day of work for training shortly after Labour Day, and then re-start production the week after that.

Initial reports indicate that after making demands for union-busting through contracting out and attacks on the union's ability to function, the company did an about-face and dropped these demands. The company also committed to not carrying out reprisals against workers for any actions on the picket line, all of which the company provoked. Workers report that the company had committed not to retaliate against all but five workers, whom it was targeting. However, at the 11th hour, right before the vote on the tentative agreement, the company agreed not to pursue any actions against any workers from the strike.

The agreement is a five-year term, a longer agreement than previous ones. Cost of living increases embedded in the previous contract remain for the first three years and then cost of living is frozen at the year three rate until the contract expires. All benefit rates have basically been frozen. The company committed to a "signing bonus" of \$3,000 – a misnomer given that due to the company's intransigence the workers have without work for six months.

Workers inform that language on "operational flexibility" stays basically the same as it was in the previous contract. "Operational flexibility" is a euphemism for contracting out union work and degrading health and safety standards but the company lost on this crucial issue facing the workers. Current language does not permit the company to act with impunity. On the contrary, the contract only permits the company to use temporary part-time (TPT) workers if all existing workers are first asked if they want the overtime work and refuse. TPTs will pay union dues and there are limits on how often they can be employed during a year.

Not permitting the company to contract out union work at this time protects the cohesion of the union which means that the workers' strength in terms of their numbers and organization impedes the fend-for-onself incoherence which the anti-social offensive has imposed on the society. It makes the fight the workers waged all these months truly significant because overall the anti-social offensive and the dangers which face humankind are increasing, not decreasing. The unity in action of Canada's workers to resolve problems in a manner which favours them and society as a whole, which humanizes the natural and social environment, is going to define everyone's future.



Reports indicate that the new contract also contains provisions for a potential annual layoff between February 1 and March 30, for maintenance of the mine's hoist. The union negotiated language that ensures that if a layoff goes longer than three weeks, it triggers a rebidding process where all jobs have to be re-posted and workers can bid on new jobs based on seniority. This can cause delays in production and is meant to act as a deterrent for layoffs going longer than three weeks.

Reflecting on the contract, workers say they are clear that it was about protecting what they had fought for over generations of contracts, rather than achieving new gains.

The head of Stone Canyon Industries Holdings Inc.'s salt division reportedly flew to Toronto to meet with the national president of Unifor and a deal was signed within hours after he dropped all the union-busting demands. This seems to indicate that the company was clear that it was not going to be able to break the union and that it had to find another way to end the strike.

The swiftness with which the company backed down gives the workers the sense that one of the aims of the strike was to control stockpiles of salt and increase its price by attacking salt workers and shifting production around. They report that after two mild winters with lower than normal sales of salt, the company decided that they could both destroy the union and raise the price of salt by provoking a strike. They did not achieve their first aim but nonetheless benefitted from the rationalization of salt production as did the other global salt monopolies.

This raises the serious problem of the need for the workers to gain control of the economy to prevent the squandering of the country's natural and human resources on the part of narrow self-serving private interests which have seized control of the economy and decision-making at the level of both provincial and federal governments. The fact that governments are conduits for such dirty activities is a matter that the workers themselves are beginning to address by looking into the need for democratic renewal of the political process.



As the days and weeks go by, the significance of the salt workers' resistance to attacks on unions in Canada by U.S. union-busting companies and their legal teams and the critical resources they extract and process will no doubt become even more clear. The workers have shown that their *NO!* means *NO!* by relying on one another on an organized basis, on working people from their own and other sectors of the economy, their own and other communities and the society at large because everyone has an interest in defending the justice of their cause. A way forward which unites everyone in action can always be found by working together for a common aim which the workers themselves

set and discuss.

Life experience shows that the security of the workers lies in their fight for the rights of all, not in contract language *per se* and that going forward they have to remain vigilant and continue building their unity in action by keeping themselves informed of unfolding events, share insights and views and take whatever actions favour them and the general interests of society within each situation. There are no short cuts, no "easy buttons" with instant solutions and only the workers know what they need and are able to work to provide it. They must speak in their own name, represent themselves and move forward from there.

Had the workers not fought back and held the line, their workforce would have been decimated and future generations of salt workers would be facing brutal conditions. This is an important advance as the main power of the workers is their conviction in the justice of their cause and their organization to maintain and build their unity, while the main power of the rich and governments in their service is the use of force and coercion in the form of the courts, police forces and disinformation from the media to deprive everyone of a perspective about what is at stake and to try to make the workers believe that they are hopeless, helpless, powerless, generally insignificant, and even a drain on the society so that they can see no way forward.

The workers at Windsor Salt in Windsor, Ontario have shown that when workers provide themselves with information and the perspective they require, they can hold their heads high and take the stands that they must.

As other salt workers who work at operations owned by Stone Canyon Industries Holdings Inc. face the company's ongoing union-busting actions, they will learn from the experience of the salt workers in Windsor, Ontario and are now in a better position to wage their own resistance. The salt workers' resistance has made it clear to SCIH and other union-busting firms that they cannot simply do as they please in Canada.

Congratulations once again to one and all for a battle well fought! We will continue to cover your concerns!



(With reports from Empower Yourself Now.)



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