



2020 Forest Industry Bargaining

USW LOCAL 1-1937 UPDATE

2020 BARGAINING UPDATE #43 – January 10, 2020

Coast Bargaining Committee - News Release

MEMBERS REINFORCE COMMITMENT TO ACHIEVE SAFETY, SECURITY AND DIGNITY IN THEIR WORKPLACES

The Local Union conducted membership meetings to overflow crowds, in all areas of the Local Union (Port Alberni, Ladysmith, Powell River, Campbell River and Port McNeill) prior to Christmas. These meetings were held to update the membership on all aspects of collective bargaining, WFP's multiple attacks on worker rights at the BC Labour Relations Board, the mediation process and the outside interference from some community leaders and certain logging contractors, which has allowed WFP to refuse to move in bargaining (see more below).

The vast majority of members spoke passionately about the need to make the necessary changes to make our workplaces safer, our jobs more secure and return dignity on the job. The Committee did hear from a few members with negative responses (likely influenced by their employers) that included the desire to get an agreement at any cost.

The message the USW Bargaining Committee received loud and clear, was that after six months of strike, our members want the Bargaining Committee to continue the fight for their rights by negotiating provisions to ensure that the members have safe shifts, secure jobs and dignity, with no concessions.

The Local Union is extremely proud of the memberships' collective strength and solidarity during this struggle. Their unity and sense of purpose to make their workplaces safe and their jobs secure is inspiring.

WFP REFUSES USW REQUEST TO RETURN TO BARGAINING TABLE UNLESS UNION AGREES TO CONTRACTING OUT CONCESSIONS

The USW Bargaining Committee met with Mediators Vince Ready and Amanda Rogers on January 9th, in Richmond BC, to review a significant compromise the Union was willing to make on its Alternate Shift proposal which the Union had worked on over the Christmas period. The change in the Union's proposal was made in order to break the impasse on the issue and get the Parties in a position to negotiate the remaining issues to reach a Collective Agreement.

After explaining our significantly revised proposal in detail, the Mediators acknowledged those significant changes and left to contact WFP's new negotiators by phone, to explain the Union's proposal and determine their interest in returning to the bargaining table.

After speaking on the phone with WFP, the Mediators returned to advise the Union that WFP would not comment on the merits of the Union's proposal and advised that WFP negotiators would not return to the table unless the USW agreed to WFP's concessionary proposal on contracting out.

As stated from the first day of bargaining, the Union again advised the Mediators that USW members will never accept WFP's Union busting contracting out proposal.

If it wasn't clear before to our members, it is crystal clear now that WFP's goal all along has been to contract out their jobs. It's Union busting plain and simple. It was in 1986 and it is in 2020.

Our Union had a 4 ½ month strike in 1986 in which the Union gained the contracting out protection we have today (Article 25). WFP proposed gutting our members' rights by contracting out in 2014 negotiations, but withdrew the demand and reached an agreement that led to exceptional profits and put the Company in a sound financial position. Now in 2019/2020 negotiations, they are again demanding our members' jobs be contracted out. In the midst of a 6+ month strike the Local Union will say again; **Workers struggled and fought to protect their jobs and bargaining units in 1986 from contracting out and they will never give up that protection.**

WORKERS DESERVE SUPPORT IN THEIR STRUGGLE FOR SAFETY RIGHTS – FAMILIES DESERVE BETTER FROM THEIR COMMUNITY LEADERS

Some coastal Mayors and Councils wittingly or unwittingly have assisted a select number of logging contractors who continue to beat the WFP drum in an effort to undermine a workers' right to strike and withdraw their services.

These elected individuals need to realize the serious and negative impact that WFP's contracting out concessions, Drug and Alcohol Policy and unsafe Alternate Shifts, have on the safety, security and dignity of workers and their families.

Before we have another fatality in this industry, Government, community leaders and the general public need to understand that, our members strike is not about money; it's about safety; it's about job security; it's about quality of life; it's about family and it's about the future. **USW members do not want to see what the eventual outcome will be with WFP's drive to force safety underground with its discriminatory Drug & Alcohol Policy and its fatigue inducing Alternate Shifts schedules. Someone losing their life is not worth continuing in the direction WFP is heading.**

The Local Union would like to acknowledge the stance community leaders like the Mayor and Council in Port Alberni have taken which acknowledge the rights of workers to bargain their collective agreement without interference and refused to sign onto other community leaders' letter which supports WFP and attacks workers' rights.

While the USW continues to work towards a Collective Agreement by revising its proposals and asking for bargaining to resume, WFP has dug in its heels in the hope that by waiting long enough (and if some communities make enough noise) the Government may act while they have their unacceptable Union busting contracting out concession on the table. It is clear that they don't want to bargain, instead they want some of their contractors and some community leaders to continue acting as WFP's proxy, in pushing for government intervention against the workers interests.

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It is completely unfair that some Mayors and Councillors are interfering with workers that are complying with their rights under the law in withdrawing their services. Workers do not want to continue working in the unsafe conditions and under the unfair treatment they face in their workplaces. By siding with WFP, some Mayors and Councils (wittingly or unwittingly) and certain contractors (who feel they will gain by having more contracting out but will more likely lose), are banding together by asking Government to intervene in a variety of ways, all of which favour WFP.

These actions are completely unacceptable to Union members who have the legal right to withdraw their services in a lawful strike.

The Union will be reaching out to speak with these community leaders in the coming weeks in order to help them understand that their rhetoric undermines workers' rights to a safe workplace and undermines the bargaining process. It is our hope that understanding more than WFP's concerns they will do the right thing and support collective bargaining without one-sided interference.

The Union has already publicly pointed out, that the reason members are on strike for this long, is due to the fact that the BC Liberal government of the day appointed a binding arbitrator to end a strike of 3 weeks in 2004.

That appointed Arbitrator stripped away USW members' rights to have safe working conditions, when they ripped up the workers right to maintain an eight (8) hour work day and imposed long hours and erratic shift schedules that have workers performing dangerous work, while impaired from fatigue and other stressors. The Arbitrator also allowed for a massive contracting out of jobs within the coastal industry, when it introduced Woodland contractors. This shameful action in 2004 set the wheels in motion that created the unsafe and unfair conditions workers face today. WFP is back again wanting to contract out even more jobs.

If Government wants to help, they can simply amend Section 3 of the BC Employment Standards Act, repeal the ability to negotiate terms that are less than the minimum protections of the Act and enforce the Section 37 requirement that any agreement to average the hours of work be signed by the employees affected. Lets be clear, this mistake and intervention by government in 2004 should never be repeated in a private sector labour dispute, that is not an essential service.

It is no secret that this strike is having a large impact on individuals and businesses, especially in forest dependent communities; no one is hurting more than USW members who are on the picket line fighting for their rights, their families rights and for the next generation of forest workers' rights, who have always benefited from Union workers who stood up and fought for safe workplaces and set the working standards for the entire industry.

When you hear about someone suffering due to the strike, please remember, the Local Union and its membership are well aware of this and are genuinely concerned but they also know that nothing was ever gained by workers sitting idly by and taking concessions from their employer.

Progressive gains in all workers' rights, from the rights in the BC Labour Code, Collective Agreement rights and those in the BC Employment Standards Act (ESA), were all fought for and gained by the struggles and suffering of organized workers.

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It is truly unfortunate that rich Executives on Western Forest Products Board of Directors are not accountable to communities even though they harvest and manufacture public timber. They sit back on their high six and seven figure salaries and encourage some elected Councils and some contractors to demonize workers on their behalf, when all USW members are seeking to improve is their safety, working conditions and earn their fair share for the profits they create in the workplace. Everyone is entitled to join a Union. Every organized worker is entitled to withdraw their service if an agreement can't be reached. Everyone is entitled to expect to be safe on the job and return in one piece to their families at the end of the day. Right now, our members are saying they don't feel safe or secure when WFP threatens their jobs and they certainly do not feel WFP cares about their wellbeing.

For those saying the Government should intervene and take away workers rights you are saying to those workers: It's ok that you don't have safe shifts, because your strike is affecting me; it's okay that you may have your job contracted out, because your strike is affecting me. **THAT IS NOT RIGHT AND THAT IS NOT ACCEPTABLE TO WORKERS.**

Finally, let's all acknowledge what is by now, clear to everyone. WFP has always had the power to end this strike, by coming to the bargaining table, clearing off their concessions, addressing their employees' serious concerns with safety, job security and lack of dignity. To get there, they first need to acknowledge they have a problem. After a strike of this length, you would think they could at least acknowledge that. Then, as a next step, they have to want to do something to improve the disastrous employee relations. The question then becomes; **DO THEY CARE?** Right now, the answer is clearly NO.



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