



Fighting Back Makes A Difference

1500 laid off in Hamilton, Workers occupy parts plant in Windsor

Mick Black
LINCHPIN

On March 4, U.S. Steel Canada, formerly known as Stelco, announced the shut down of its Hamilton mill and closing most of its Lake Erie operations, affecting up to 1,500 jobs according to the company.

U.S. Steel has already laid off close to 700 of the 1,700 hourly employees in Hamilton, where it shut down its blast furnace in November. Between October and March Ontario lost 160,000 jobs, including more than 3,900 in the Hamilton area.

The government response has offered workers nothing. Early on, McGuinty promised that US Steel would honour pensions for workers. But the Hamilton Spectator reports that up to 300 workers only months from 30 years of employment qualification mark will be denied company pensions, which pay out about \$2,650 a month. The Employment Insurance maximum pays less than \$2000.

Speaking to The Marxist Leninist Daily, Steelworkers Local 1005 President and former Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) candidate Rolf Gerstenberger exclaimed, "This shutdown is socially irresponsible! Our members cannot and will not accept these anti-social attacks."

Gerstenberger is calling for emergency measures and nationalization by the government: "One such measure in this situation could be an emergency government takeover of the wholesale market in steel. All steel sold in Canada during this emergency would first have to come from Canadian production with mills working at full capacity....If U.S. Steel or the other foreign monopolies do not agree with this, they should hand over the mills and other facilities to the government for one dollar."

Unfortunately for Hamilton steelworkers, even if the government and other political parties had any intention of nationalizing industry away from the capitalists, the exploitation of workers that a capitalist economy is based on would continue.



Photo: John Milton

Nearly 2000 people march in Hamilton March 21 in the wake of U.S. Steel lay offs.

A statement issued by the Hamilton branch of Common Cause and handed out to hundreds of steelworkers and other labour activists reads, in part: "Against privatization and nationalization, we want socialization of the economy. We want to decide democratically, in workplace and community councils, how and what to produce. Our livelihoods, our communities and our environment are too important to be left in the hands of big business and big government. They need us but we don't need them!"

Meanwhile, in Windsor, Ontario, workers at a auto parts plant Aradco, which produces parts for Chrysler, were notified that they were laid off without receiving adequate severance packages or other benefits. 64% voted to reject an offer from Chrysler that would have provided them with \$205,000 out of a total of \$1.7-million in back pay, vacation pay, severance and termination pay that they are owed.

Workers immediately set up a picket line, blocking efforts by Chrysler to move machinery out of the plant. After several days of picketing and blocking trucks from taking the parts, about a dozen workers stormed and occupied the shuttered plant, welding the doors shut and occupying the plant overnight. A crowd of about 500 gathered for a workers' rights rally outside Aradco

con't on pg 2

About Us

Common Cause is an Ontario anarchist organization. We publish the Linchpin paper bimonthly, as well as additional content online. Branches are active in Hamilton, Ottawa and Toronto, and there is interest elsewhere, including northern Ontario. We welcome new members and alliances with activist groups. Contact us at: commoncauseontario@gmail.com

Educating for freedom

Sarah Lawrance
LINCHPIN

As Cindy Milstein notes in her talk *Educating for Freedom*, anarchists tend to engage primarily in educational projects – ones that we often don't immediately understand as educational.

Organizing and attending events such as bookfairs, conferences, demonstrations, and workshops; coordinating and sustaining free school projects, libraries, infoshops, and bookstores; and publishing books, zines, websites, and pamphlets are only a few examples of how anarchists initiate and participate in processes of educating themselves as well as the wider world.

The form of these projects and spaces may be as temporary as an hour-long or weekend activity, while others are more akin to semi-permanent institutions. With all of their differences, these projects are united by the intention to create space for the exchange and development of ideas. Bookfairs, libraries, and bookstores create an environment where diverse ideas can be shared, discovered, and explored through discussions, social and political events, as well as formally and informally published materials. Free schools, the most explicitly educational projects engaged in by anarchists, tend to have an uncomfortable relationship with their mainstream counterparts because of their inherent challenge to the relationships of authority that characterize and underlie the traditional education system.

Also educational in nature, demonstrations, pickets, and protests tend to be the most visible and contentious public expressions of the anarchist commitment to education, where the intent is both to inform the public about the issue at hand while also expressing dissatisfaction with its current state.

In addition to their content, these projects exist at an intersection of education and politics in another way: their organizational structures and the learning models they employ are often directly democratic and involve organizers and participants together in the education process.

These projects tend to challenge the notion that learning must happen in formal and specifically defined educational settings like traditional

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schools. They also challenge the unequal relationships between students, teachers, and administrators in the traditional education system by providing an alternative where participants are all able to teach and learn from one another, to varying degrees. These projects thus serve as living examples of the kind of world their participants would like to create.

This last point is central to Milstein's analysis. Anarchist projects tend to prefigure the kind of world their participants envision and desire. To borrow from two books I love – *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization* (University of Toronto Press: 2006) and *Reinventing Anarchy, Again* (AK Press: 1996) – all these projects of “utopian pedagogy” are necessary to building the “revolutionary transfer culture” that will get us from where we are to where we want to be.

Sarah is involved with Ottawa's EXILE Infoshop. She helped organize the Unschooling Oppression conference where Milstein originally spoke. Cindy Milstein's talk is published in zine format by EXILE Press in Ottawa (<http://www.exilebooks.org/en/exile-press/>) and can be listed to at <http://www.archive.org/details/educatingForFreedom-CindyMilstein>

con't from pg 1

in the morning. The workers, smoking cigarettes, wearing ballcaps and waving CAW flags, clambered onto the plant roof. The crowd whistled and roared. One of them carried a cardboard placard reading “Fighting back makes a difference.”

The workers forced Chrysler to agree to pay a total compensation of \$400,000 – almost double the original offer – but still falling far short of the total amount owed. Could they have won more if they had been able to extend the struggle to all workers in Windsor and other auto plants in a wave of plant occupations and general strikes? We won't know for sure until we try, but such mass action certainly holds more hope for more meaningful change when compared to the massive concessionary contracts that CAW President Ken Lewenza is churning out with the big three auto-manufacturers.

We need to turn the tide on the attacks on workers by following the example of the rank and file at Aradco and extend and deepen that fighting spirit, spreading from mass pickets to workplace occupations, mass protests and general strikes as in France, where 2 million workers took to the streets against growing unemployment.

Fighting back does make a difference, and events like the Aradco struggle show that workers can mobilize a mass, militant movement

against the attacks on them by the bosses. What we need now is the confidence, strategy and organization to take it further and on a much larger scale – not simply as isolated local unions but as a mass movement of working class people – turning factory occupations into worker controlled factories that produce for the communities we live in, not for the benefit of a parasitic capitalist class.

With Files from *The Marxist Leninist Daily* and *The Windsor Star*.



Occupying workers on the roof of their Windsor plant

World Socialist Web Site:
www.wsws.org

Turn things right side up: anarchist perspectives on defending health care

Public health in Ontario is under attack yet again. The McGuinty government is attempting to quietly carry out deep cuts to health care by funding hospitals at less than the rate of inflation. This is leading to widespread budget deficits at provincial hospitals which are then forced by law to balance the books. For patients and front-line workers this means increases in service fees such as parking and space rentals, cuts to services and layoffs.

Their plans have sparked resistance by local communities across the province. Rallies in several cities have attracted thousands of people and organizing is ongoing, led by the Ontario Health Coalition, a network of over 400 grassroots organizations. With the economic crisis and provincial budget deficits upon us, the attack on health care and resistance to it are likely to intensify. This is, then, a good time to consider anarchist perspectives on defending and improving our health care system.

For anarchists, how we as a society provide health care is first and foremost a question of values. We stand opposed to capitalism's core value, which is profit. According to this value everything, including our health, can and should be measured according to how much private profit it can create. Health care has value for the capitalist when it creates profit. If it does not, then health care is not valued. The capitalists argue that health care should be eliminated (especially if business is taxed to pay for it) or it should be privatized and made for-profit. This is the value system that has driven governments and business to attack our public health care system over and over again.

Anarchists reject the profit value in all aspects of society – be it providing health care or a candy bar. Instead, we hold and work towards other values. Most important in the case of health care are need and equality. Meeting the needs of all should be the basic value by which we provide health care. This difference in values is the difference between a system that spends more on marketing Viagra than on preventing malaria – which kills millions every year – and a system which provides the best care possible to all.

Anarchists also value real democracy. We struggle for a health care system where workers, patients and their communities have the power and resources to decide what are their health care needs and how they should be met. Currently, top-down control is how our health care system is run. Those at the top, who are the farthest removed from the day-to-day workings of the system, have the most power. Those at the bottom, the workers and patients who have the most knowledge and experience, have little to no power. If profit is capitalism's value, top-down control is the value of government or the state.

This is an upside-down way to run any part of our society. As anarchists we struggle to set things right-side up. Health care should be available to all based on need and it should be provided by a system of directly democratic community and workplace councils working together across regions. The government wants to reduce the cost of health care. As anarchists we can't think of a better place to start than by removing the needless layers of corporate managers, bureaucrats and politicians, right up to the health minister and the premier.



On the Web

- **They didn't share the wealth, why should we share the pain?**

For the past 30 years, the rich got richer off our backs

- **Hamilton's "jobs first" rally: I'm moved, but where are we going?**

Members opinion of march 21st rally

More available at **linchpin.ca**

Interfering Again?

Algonquins of Barriere Lake eye Ottawa's governance plans

Kim Mackrael

LINCHPIN

On March 3, 2009, *The Globe and Mail* obtained documents which reveal that the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (INAC) has been secretly planning to overhaul native governance rules without public debate or transparent consultation with First Nations.

The changes would revive the key elements of the First Nations Governance Act, including mandatory rules for bands on how to conduct elections and make their spending public to members. The Act, put forward in 2002 by the Liberal government of the time, was abandoned after widespread protest from First Nations communities across the country.

As part of the recommended changes to elections, the documents indicate a desire to challenge the selection of community leaders by custom. The documents recommend that changes "would not be optional." When questioned about the secret documents by *The Globe and Mail*, Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl gave this reassurance: "Trust me. When we do the review, it won't be to say: 'How do we make things less accountable and less transparent?'"

But the Algonquins of Barriere Lake (Mitchibinikok Inik), a reserve community four hours north of Ottawa, say they already have experience with the federal government imposing non-optional changes on their traditional governing system. "We have always ruled ourselves according to custom, outside the electoral provisions of the Indian Act," Barriere Lake youth spokesperson Norman Matchewan explained in a recent *Montreal Gazette* editorial. "Elders nominate eligible leaders who are then approved, by consensus if possible, in assemblies. Participation is open only to those who live in the community, speak our language, and have knowledge of and connection to the land."

In 1996, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs stopped recognizing Barriere Lake's Customary Chief and Council and appointed a small faction as an "interim band council". Mediation in 1997 resulted in the community codifying their leadership selection process into a customary governance code in an effort to make it more open and transparent and to prevent the government from interfering with their leadership again.

Yet since the selection process was codified, the community alleges that INAC has interfered with Barriere Lake's leadership decisions two more times. "Our good faith and patience and reasonable demands have so far been rewarded by broken promises, deceit, and deplorable interventions," Matchewan says. "Is this all we can expect?" The Algonquin Nation Secretariat and the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs called the most recent interference, in March 2008, a coup d'état. A secret memo released

Photo: Maya Rolbin-Ghanie and dominionpaper.ca



Algonquins blockade at Rapid Lake Reserve last fall.

to their lawyers last month confirms that INAC made a deliberate decision to recognize the new band council based on its expectations for "improved collaboration of the new council with INAC."

"Our major problem is that the federal government is trying to get out of a landmark agreement that would give us co-management of our traditional territories and improve our dire economic situation," Matchewan says. "They're using divide and rule tactics, ousting our legitimate Chief and Council and recognizing individuals who don't have the support of the community's majority." The Algonquins of Barriere Lake see themselves as defending what has always been theirs – the right to choose their own leadership using their own customary system.

The documents uncovered by the *Globe and Mail* may come as a shock to many who believed that right was secure. In Barriere Lake, they've been fighting for it for years.

Kim is active with the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement in Ottawa.

More info: barrierelakesolidarity.blogspot.com

Events

Hamilton

• Conference of the Migrant Workers Family Resource Centre
April 25, 2009
Student Centre, 3rd Floor, McMaster
Contact: Nestor Corpus 905-529-2934 or reco462000@yahoo.com
Time: 2:30pm

• Hamilton Anarchist Bookfair
Saturday, June 6th
Westdale High School
Time: 10am-4pm

Ottawa

Anarchist discussion group on feminism and workers' struggles. Sunday, May 3rd, 1:00pm
@ Jack Purcell Community Centre.
Contact: a_ottawa@mutualaid.org

Linchpin Locations

Hamilton

Skydragon Centre, 27 King William

London

Empowerment Infoshop, 636 Queens Ave

Ottawa

Exile Infoshop, 256 Bank St

Toronto

Toronto Women's Bookstore, 73 Harbord

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