

Stop the sellout of the Ontario construction workers' strike! Build rank-and-file committees!

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26 May 2022

Are you an Ontario construction worker? Contact the World Socialist Web Site to tell us what you think of the unions' sellout contracts and to discuss building rank and file committees to lead a way forward for your struggle.

The trade unions are trying to scuttle the largest Ontario construction workers' strike in 20 years. Over 43,000 workers took strike action earlier this month to win significant wage gains amid soaring inflation and record profitability for the property development and building corporations.

The union representing the most workers, the Labourers' International Union of North America (LiUNA), has already forced concession-filled contracts onto most of their members. LiUNA has intentionally concealed the details of the new contracts in what amounts to a continuation of a deliberate strategy to keep workers isolated and sell out the strike at the first opportunity. Workers forced to vote on tentative agreements sealed between the union bosses and the corporations had no way of fully knowing what they were signing up to.

The little information that has been revealed through leaks by rank-and-file workers shows total wage increases of roughly 12 percent or less spread out over three years. This is actually a severe pay cut when considering that the cost of living has increased 6.8 percent year-over-year.

Fifteen thousand carpenters organized under the Carpenters' District Council of Ontario remain on strike and are scheduled to vote on a tentative agreement this Friday, May 27. Carpenters should decisively vote down the sellout agreement, which will undoubtedly contain below-inflation pay increases and many nasty surprises that the strikers will only learn about long after they return to work.

The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 793, which represents crane and heavy equipment operators, ended their strike on May 20 with raises of just \$3 per year over the next three years. Some smaller unions representing painters and sheet metal workers are still negotiating.

All construction workers, whether currently striking or recently sent back to work, must be warned: the union

leadership has carved you up like a pie and sold you off piece by piece to the employers' associations, when you should all have gone out on strike together and refused to sign until all of you received a wage increase that exceeds inflation and improvements to working conditions.

It is not too late to take control of these strikes and win the pay raises and cost-of-living adjustments you need to survive 7 percent inflation and feed your families. Even the brief and sporadic interruptions to construction due to the strike have had a powerful impact across the province.

However, if you want to win, you must organize yourselves into rank-and-file committees completely independent of the union bureaucracy, made up of the most principled and trusted workers. You must be ready to oppose the union-employer conspiracy to cripple and divide you. You must do this by organizing across different bargaining units, locals, and unions.

This is the complete opposite of what the union bureaucrats have done throughout these strikes.

First of all, the leadership of the various construction unions never once challenged the anti-worker labour relations law that limits the strike to a 45-day window that ends on June 15. After that, any issues still in dispute are automatically sent to arbitration, which always favours the employer. Essentially, the unions and employers can starve the workers out for a month and a half, knowing that they will get their way in the end.

Second, even though all construction workers labour under similar conditions and for roughly similar wages, they have been separated from one another along completely arbitrary lines. WSWs reporting teams visited a construction site where members of LiUNA Local 506 were picketing while other members of the same local were busy working inside. In other words, the union leadership has done everything it can to ensure minimal disruption for the employers and the most ineffectual strike possible, including sending its own members across its own picket lines. In many cases, workers were denied strike pay.

Third, the union leadership has imposed an information blackout on the rank-and-file. The union bureaucrats withhold details of the sellout agreements cooked up with the employers

until the last possible second because they know how workers will react. Most often, rank-and-file workers were shown selective “highlights” of the contracts just minutes before being forced to vote on them. Social media is filled with questions and comments by workers asking for details of this or that contract, with no replies from union officials. Union bureaucrats have spent far more time talking to the employers than their own members.

Rank-and-file strike committees must therefore be urgently established to put forward the following demands:

- Ten percent wage increases each year to compensate for years of stagnant wages, as well as guaranteed cost-of-living adjustments;
- All construction workers on strike with full pay. Nobody works until all demands are met;
- No ratification of any tentative agreements until all bargaining units achieve above-inflation pay increases;
- Repudiate all contracts undemocratically rammed through by the union bosses as illegitimate for failing to provide adequate wage increases;
- Daily in-depth updates on negotiations between the union and the employer. No back room deals;
- At least one week between the presentation of any tentative agreement and a ratification vote so workers have time to study and discuss its full terms.

The so-called trade union leaderships are nothing more than well-paid and privileged bureaucrats who have nothing in common with the average rank-and-file construction worker. Even those who claim to have “risen through the ranks” made their peace with the unions’ pro-capitalist perspective when they traded the job site for the corporate board room. They do not view the strikers as fellow workers whose interests must be served, but as a source of dues income who should keep quiet and know their place at the bottom.

Joseph S. Mancinelli, LiUNA’s International Vice President and Regional Manager of Central and Eastern Canada, earns a total annual compensation of \$402,224. Other union executives undoubtedly take home similar six-figure incomes, insulating them from the hardship workers are being made to endure with these real-terms pay cuts.

The union bureaucracy’s determination to sabotage the strike without meeting any of the workers’ needs flows from their concern that a genuine struggle for decent-paying, secure jobs could trigger a social explosion under conditions where millions of working people in Ontario and across Canada are feeling the impact of rampant inflation, more than two years of a deadly pandemic and the threat of world war. They fear a mass movement of workers like the plague because it would cut across the unions’ close relationship with the established political parties, which are all responsible for imposing austerity, attacks on workers’ rights, and spending cuts.

LiUNA, which previously supported the Liberals, has moved far to the right by throwing its support behind Premier Doug

Ford and his Progressive Conservatives. Since coming to power in 2018 with a right-wing populist campaign modelled on the fascist-minded US ex-President Trump, Ford has maintained an unbroken record of social spending cuts, public sector wage freezes, and strikebreaking. The Liberals and New Democratic Party are no better, having done the same when each was in power.

The reality is that construction workers, like workers in every industry, will find no way forward by supporting any of the establishment parties. All of the major parties serve the interests of the major developers like PCL, EllisDon, and Aecon, who will and have sacrificed workers’ jobs, wages and lives for their bottom line.

Construction workers seeking a way to fight back must take up a political struggle by establishing rank-and-file committees to unify their strikes with other sections of the working class who are also eager to fight back against decades of capitalist austerity. Recent months have seen strikes and courageous struggles by New Brunswick public sector workers, CP Rail workers, Union Station signal operators in Toronto, and Metro grocery store distribution workers across Ontario. The months ahead will see teachers and education support staff in Ontario, as well as educators and public sector workers in British Columbia preparing for strike action. Across the border in the United States, 20,000 dock workers are preparing to walk out on July 1, while strikes by CNH agricultural equipment manufacturers in Iowa and health care workers throughout the country are already under way.

What all of these struggles require above all is a socialist and internationalist perspective to unify them and secure victory. The fight for decent wages to ensure a reasonable standard of living, safe workplaces to protect against COVID-19 infection and injuries on the job, and provisions for a comfortable retirement demands a frontal assault on the death grip exercised by the capitalist financial oligarchy over all aspects of social and economic life.

There is no time to lose! Contact the *World Socialist Web Site* today for assistance in establishing a rank-and-file strike committee at your workplace.



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