

May 4, 2017

In Defense of International Unionism

Recently, the role of national vs. international unionism has come under scrutiny. British Columbia Premier Christy Clark, launched an attack on United Steelworkers International President, Brother Leo Gerard. Just weeks before an election in British Columbia, Clark baselessly accused Brother Gerard of supporting Trump's tariffs on softwood lumber.

Brother Gerard responded bluntly to the lies, "British Columbia Liberal leader Christy Clark has falsely claimed that my meeting with U.S. President Donald Trump was about softwood lumber – she just made that up – in fact it was about protecting our members' jobs in the steel industry in both the U.S. and in Canada."

The divide and conquer tactics from right-wing politicians should come as no surprise. Perhaps Clark hoped lumber workers in British Columbia would fall for this trap. But those who have worked in this industry know that it is not unions, but nearly two decades of BC Liberal rule, that has hurt workers. BC Liberal policies have led to the closure of over 100 mills and the loss of 35,000 forestry jobs. Christy Clark has no credibility to talk about protecting jobs, as she exports raw logs and the jobs that go with them.

Brother Gerard was quick to attack the cynical moves of the lumber bosses and their friends in government. "The tariffs filed by Trump have nothing to do with protecting jobs in the U.S.; in fact it will cost Americans 8,000 jobs in the construction industry alone. It has more to do with U.S. lumber companies trying to drive up prices and increase their profits. And quite frankly Canadian lumber companies like West Fraser and Interfor stand to benefit no matter what. They've taken profits from B.C. to buy mills in the U.S. and hedge their bets. It's the small operators, the value added sector, and most importantly our members and their communities that get hurt the most."

CUPW has always understood that the class struggle does not stop at the borders. That's why we actively work with postal unions around the world. Brother Gerard's comments brilliantly illustrate how transnational corporations try to pit workers of one country against workers of another. The BC Liberal tricks are a perfect example of why we not only need international unions, but unions with an international focus.

In Solidarity,



Mike Palecek
National President

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