

November 13, 2019

Brian Butler,
President,
United Steelworkers Union,
351 Brae Rd.,
Duncan, BC
V9L 3T9
BButler@usw1-1937.ca

Roger MacDougall,
Director, Labour Relations
Western Forest Products
800 - 1055 W. Georgia St.,
Vancouver, BC
V6E 3P3
rmacdougall@westernforest.com

Re: Western Forest Products and United Steelworkers Dispute

As leaders of communities that are severely impacted by the Western Forest Products and United Steelworkers labour dispute, we are compelled to draw your attention to the economic devastation this dispute is causing for the families who live and work in our communities; the people whose support we rely on as the economic backbone of our local economies.

While we are heartened to see talks have resumed this week, the previous rounds of on-again/off-again negotiations have not been encouraging; more than four months into this dispute, there appears to be little in the way of concrete progress. This is very concerning to us as community leaders.

Our communities are suffering the negative impacts of this conflict and we are fearful of the spiraling financial consequences if the labour action extends much longer.

Thousands of workers have barely earned an income since the strike began in July, and many are unable to make ends meet.

- We are beginning to see houses listed for sale.
- We have seen tow trucks repossessing peoples' vehicles.
- Hydro has disconnected services to peoples' homes.
- The food banks are having difficulty meeting the demand and recently a food truck made a special delivery to Woss, Port McNeill & Port Hardy.
- In Ladysmith, (with two WFP mills), dozens of supporting contractors and suppliers rely on these mills as core customers; the impacts of this dispute are extending broadly into the community - well beyond those who are on the picket lines.
- The dispute has caused major layoffs in tertiary industries; in Chemainus, one remanufacturing plant cut its shifting in half due to a lack of fibre supply.
- Challenges with fibre supply are creating ongoing cost and acquisition complications for the Paper Excellence/Catalyst operations in Crofton and Port Alberni.

- Five hundred direct and indirect jobs are affected by this dispute in the Powell River area.

If this dispute continues, we expect attrition of the workforce will occur with older workers opting to take early retirement and younger workers seeking work in alternative sectors. This dispute is deterring the next generation from wanting to work in this industry, and we are already witnessing highly skilled workers leaving for Northern BC or Alberta. Additionally, there has been a marked impact on other economic sectors which rely on a prosperous forestry economy. Businesses are feeling the effects of a strike, and those who are already operating on a thin red line might not be able to recover. Restaurants, clothing and furniture stores, and others are part of the economic backbone that keeps people living in our communities. If they are forced to close as a result of this situation, it will have a detrimental effect on future recruitment and retention efforts.

We acknowledge there are important issues to be sorted out between the USW and WFP, and we would not presume to “take sides” in this dispute. However, time is ticking and we need both sides to be earnest in their bargaining and seek a resolution as soon as possible, even if temporarily.

As you continue your current round of negotiations, our communities and the families within them are asking you to bargain in good faith. We are asking you to press through your differences for the sake of every family who is struggling. We need you to look across the table and see the faces of your employees or union members, because that’s what this dispute is about. With the strike now into its fifth month, our communities can’t sustain this loss of employment for very much longer. We urge you to stick with the collective bargaining process for the sake of all of those who are experiencing great hardship.

Sincerely,



Gabrielle Wickstrom,

G. Wickstrom

Mayor,
Town of Port MaNeill



Dennis Dugas

Dennis Dugas

Mayor,
District of Port Hardy



George Doubt

G. Doubt

Acting Mayor,
City of Powell River



Aaron Stone

A. Stone

Mayor,
Town of Ladysmith



John MacDonald

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John MacDonald".

Mayor,
Village of Sayward



Al Siebring

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Al Siebring".

Mayor,
District of North Cowichan

Cc:

Premier John Horgan: john.horgan.mla@leg.bc.ca

Doug Donaldson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, and Rural
Development: doug.donaldson.MLA@leg.bc.ca