

Sudbury miners take on INCO

The lack of control over the national economy is a phenomenon which has plagued developing countries since the early days of colonial exploitation. To the industrialized countries of the world it is a relatively recent phenomenon.

The growth of "multi" or "trans" national corporations, with allegiances grounded solely in profit margins, however, has suddenly, made control over vital economic sectors an immediate concern in countries around the globe.

Nowhere has this question been highlighted more starkly than in Canada where the mainstays of the economy (resource extraction) have suddenly and systematically been undermined by the main beneficiaries of its development.

The phenomenon has manifested itself in a consistent form across the country. In Newfoundland last year Alcan decided to shut down its operations in the town of St. Lawrence in favor of purchasing cheaper ore from Mexican sources. In northern New Brunswick, where Noranda Group holds a monopoly over the mining industry, operations have been gradually reduced in favor of more profitable investments in the mines of fascist Chile.

In the forest industry, the leading producers, have been rapidly cultivating high yield projects in South America in preparation for a mass abandonment of their Canadian investments as soon as the profit margins become more attractive.

In each case the disruptions have resulted in soaring unemployment rolls and economic stagnation for the communities most directly involved.

The incident which has elicited most attention, however, has been the case of the International Nickel Company (INCO) because of the sheer magnitude of impact that the company's decision to shift its operations to the third world has had on the Canadian economy and the people of Sudbury.

Art Moses, a resident of the Sudbury area and a former bureau chief for Canadian University Press outlines how the mining community, political and organized labour have reacted to the INCO pullouts.

On September 15 the 11,700 workers of INCO Limited in Sudbury, Ontario, closed Canada's largest mining operation. No ordinary labour dispute, the firm determination of the miners and smelter workers of Local 6500 of the United Steel Workers of America represent a challenge to the power of multinational corporations over Canada's resources.

Although feelings of unionsolidarity soared in the weeks before Christmas, as wives of the strikers organized giant parties, with toys donated by unions across Ontario and Sudbury merchants, there's no early settlement likely from New York based INCO.

Since 1972 INCO has slashed its workforce in Sudbury from 18,000 to less than 12,000, and made major cuts at Thompson, Manitoba and Port Hope, Ontario. Meanwhile, the company bought a major battery manufacturer in the U.S., and sank more than 1 billion dollars into new mines in Indonesia and Guatemala, before growth in the nickel industry slowed after 1975.

Then came the announcement of layoffs in October 1977. INCO chopped its workforce in Canada by more than 3,000, and forced thousands more workers to

production from its most profitable operation (Sudbury) and increase production from Indonesia and Guatemala where profits will be low for some time."

INCO chairman Carter denies the company wanted a strike. "A strike is economic warfare, and there are no winners or losers."

The youthful president of Local 6500 disagrees.

"It's happening everywhere," said 29-year old Dave Patterson, elected president on a rank-and-file program in 1976. "Companies are trying to blackmail their workers into giving up what they had in the past. It's time somebody took a stand and it might as well be the workers in Sudbury."

His call has apparently captured the imagination of labour groups elsewhere in Canada.

After hearing Patterson speak in November, delegates to the convention of the British Columbia Federation of Labour voted to donate 23 tons of herring to the INCO strikers. Members of the United Fishermen and Allied Workers union caught the fish, and the International Woodworkers of America paid for transportation.

Until the 1960's Sudbury produced more than 90% of the capitalist world's nickel. Since then western financial institutions and the US government have encouraged other producers to get into the act. INCO's market share has dropped to about 33 percent, but its Sudbury operations remains the largest and lowest cost single source of nickel in the non-communist world.

accept demotions into jobs where they often could not use their particular skills.

The layoffs set the stage for 1978 contract talks.

Holding a stockpile of nickel least six months above normal supply, INCO demanded workers accept a one-year wage freeze. After an unprecedented six-week summer shut down, the company's final offer in September was a wage increase amounting to 4 cents an hour.

The proposal emerged from a eleventh-hour meeting between INCO chairman J. Edwin Carter and Ontario Premier William Davis.

INCO's offer also included demands to alter and weaken the power of union stewards in grievance procedure, and contained no improvements in INCO's pension. INCO pensions are among the lowest in Canadian heavy industry. They are a top priority for the union which wants to encourage older workers to retire early to enhance the job security of younger workers.

Nickel industry analysts have predicted INCO would try to provoke a strike to force a reduction in its stockpile. This said that without a strike, the company's heavy burden of debt for its third world projects would have forced more layoffs in Canada in 1979.

"It's ironic," one analyst said. "But because of those debts INCO must cut

Northern Ontario locals of the Retail, Wholesale and Department store union raised money for 1000 Christmas turkeys, a donation matched by the union in southern Ontario. The Canadian Food and Allied Workers and the Ontario Federation of Labour joined "Operation Turkey" with 1000 more birds of their own.

And the St. Catharines and District Labour Council sent a truckload of more than \$35,000 worth of toys for Christmas.

A spokesman for District 1 (Ontario) of the United Steelworkers says donations from other union locals to Local 6500 have set a record for North America.

Teams of strikers are meeting an unusually generous response collecting money at plant gates across Ontario.

And in January the local started sending strikers to other provinces.

Their need is overwhelming. Local 6500 gets \$860,000 a week from the Steelworkers International strike fund in Pittsburgh. That works out to strike pay of \$25 a week for single workers, \$30 for married, and \$3 per dependent child. The local also needs more than \$400,000 a month to pay the strikers' medical insurance and life insurance premiums. That leaves a monthly deficit of more than \$200,000 for Canada's second largest union local.

The strikers' morale got a big boost the weekend of Dec. 9-11 when supporters

held benefit concerts in Ottawa, Toronto and Thunder Bay.

The mushrooming of support has apparently impressed the leaders of Steelworkers District 6 who were known to be lukewarm at first. District 6 director Stewart Cooke organized a \$40,000 Christmas fund and a spokesperson for Cooke applauded "the courage of the strikers in taking a stand against a multinational that doesn't think it's responsible to anyone". That statement came when he presented the money in Sudbury Dec. 21. Combined with fund-raising and a car raffle by a citizens strike support committee in Sudbury, the money allowed Local 6500 to give strikers an extra \$5 per dependent child as a Christmas gift voucher.

Cooke caused some bitterness in September when he urged workers not to strike. He was speaking in a surprise telephone call to a reporter from Atlantic City, New Jersey, where he was attending the union's international convention. Sudbury media outlets used Cooke's remarks to discourage a strike vote, and the 61 percent majority was lower than expected.

Then two days after the strike began former Ontario NDP leader Stephen Lewis termed the strike "sheer madness". In a newspaper column he accused Local 6500 leaders of "misplaced militancy" and of being "Archie Bunkers of the left".

The column provoked an angry reaction from the Sudbury area's three NDP provincial legislators, and federal MP for Nickel Belt John Rodriguez. In a clear reference to Lewis they criticized "those who would sneer at workers struggles, and forget that many gains in the past have been won fighting against seemingly insurmountable odds." They were backed by current Ontario NDP leader Michael Cassidy, and delegates to the annual convention of the Ontario Federation of Labour who gave Patterson a standing ovation and called unanimously for the nationalization of INCO "under democratic and public ownership."

Advisors to federal NDP leader Ed Broadbent initially urged he stay away from the Sudbury strike, but on Dec. 14 he visited the picket lines to donate a cheque for \$1700 from members of the party caucus in Ottawa "to show we are deeply committed to your cause". It was Broadbent's first comment on the strike since it began.

Sudbury East NDP member Elie Martel introduced a bill in the Ontario Legislature in mid-December calling for the nationalization of INCO. He says "within ten minutes INCO public relations was on the

phone to ask for a copy." But Broadbent told a Sudbury news conference he "would have to do more homework" before he could endorse nationalization. Cassidy also equivocates on the issue.

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Local 6500 has been showing the movie "Controlling Interest" on the picket lines to focus worker attention on the problem of multinational corporations having a stranglehold on the world's resources. The strike in Sudbury may reach a turning point when INCO workers in Thompson, Man., decide what to do when their contract expires Feb. 28.

WIVES OF INCO WORKERS ORGANIZE TO BACK STRIKE

Perhaps the most significant development since the strike began has been the organization of strikers' wives to back the union.

The formation of Wives Supporting the Strike was sparked by an area feminist group "Women Helping Women", in response to the historic role played by INCO wives in 1958.

That was the last time workers here went on strike in face of large stockpiles of nickel. The strike also began in September, but by December conservative politicians and church leaders had organized thousands of workers' wives to a back-to-work rally.

The rally helped pressure the workers to accept a humiliating wage settlement and a \$25 Christmas bonus.

"We were determined that would not happen again," said Linda Obonsawin, spokesperson for Wives Supporting the Strike. "We formed the group because when the men are on strike, we're on strike too, and we wanted to get the women together to make sure they understood the issues, and figure out how we could help each other. Social tensions tend to increase during strikes."

The group has organized clothing exchanges and pot luck suppers throughout the Sudbury region. The biggest project was a massive two-day Christmas party, in which the wives distributed thousands of toys to children of the strikers. The toys were donated by other unions and Sudbury merchants.

While the children waited in line to see Santa Claus, the women handed them a comic book called "What is a Strike".

Organized Working Women, a group affiliated to the Ontario Federation of Labour, organized a benefit concert in Toronto, Dec. 9 called "Women Fighting INCO". Joan Kuyek of "Women Helping Women" told the audience of more than 400 that the strike has galvanized "the hatred people in Sudbury feel towards INCO". She attacked the company for taking riches out of the Sudbury mineral basin, and leaving little in return, while always trying to split its workers.

Standing ovations also went out to Obonsawin and INCO striker Cathy Duhaime, one of about 75 women hired for surface work about 5 years ago. Only 33 women remain after the latest round of layoffs.

The INCO strike also raised an example of how student councils and the student press can assist labour and build links with unions. The student council at Laurentian University and the Lambda (student newspaper) staff agreed to provide free typesetting facilities and personnel for production of the bi-weekly "Strike Support News".

