

The Brantford Expositor

ECP workers garner support;

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Page: A3

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Illustrations: CHRISTOPHER SMITH The Expositor ; (Above left) Ontario Federation of Labour president Sid Ryan urges increased pressure on the Ontario government at a labour summit held at the Brantford and District Labour Centre on Monday morning. A strike at Engineered Coating Products in Brantford is entering its third year and is becoming the "poster child" for anti-replacement-worker legislation in Ontario.; ; CHRISTOPHER SMITH The Expositor ; (Above right) Striking workers at Engineered Coating Products and other labour groups gathered to hear speakers at a labour summit held on Monday afternoon outside the company's plant on Elgin Street.;

We'll be back.

That was the word from labour leaders who held an "anti-scab legislation" summit and rally in Brantford on Monday.

"We're going to be back here on Sept. 15, 16 and 17," Ontario Federation of Labour president Sid Ryan said.

"We're going to bring in workers from primarily the GTA, but from across the province to tell this employer enough is enough.

"These people have been on the picket line for years and that's what happens when you don't have anti-scab legislation."

Ryan was joined by labour leaders representing the CAW, United Steelworkers, CUPE and others to participate in the summit and rally. The two events were organized by the Brantford and District Labour Council and were held in support of the striking workers at Engineered Coated Products on Elgin Street.

Monday marked the second anniversary of the labour dispute, which has mostly centered on concessions demanded by the company.

Union officials have said the company has demanded wage rollbacks that would amount to about 25 per cent. A company spokesman has refused to say how much ECP is looking for in rollbacks but says concessions are needed to keep the plant viable.

Workers also have said they have offered to take a rollback of just over 16 per cent but say the company wasn't interested in their offer. The 84 workers are represented by the United Steelworkers Local 1-500.

ECP has been bringing in replacement workers for quite some time now and have defended the practice, saying they have to do everything they can to keep the plant open to keep up with customer demands. They have said they are committed to Brantford and to keeping the plant open.

But Ryan and other participants at the summit say the strike is an example of why legislation either banning or limiting the use of replacement workers is needed in Ontario.

"The collective bargaining process works when you have balance and both sides have something to lose,"

Ryan said. "That's what drives the process."

If companies are allowed to bring in replacement workers, the balance of bargaining is tipped in the company's favour, he said.

Ryan said organized labour needs to "raise the temperature" at the Engineered Coated Products picket line and prevent replacement workers from crossing the line. After two years it's pretty clear the company isn't going to come back to the bargaining table, he said.

"Why would they when they can continue to bring scabs across the picket line day in and day out.

"We need to raise the temperature there and stop scabs from crossing the line."

More than 70 people including some local politicians as well as some NDP MPs and NDP MPPs attended the summit at the labour centre. The afternoon rally attracted a huge crowd of both private and public sector workers and some politicians.

The province had anti-replacement worker legislation under the NDP government of Bob Rae but the legislation was scrapped under the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris.

Lobbying efforts to bring such legislation back since the liberals took over under Premier Dalton McGuinty have not met with any success.

Ryan urged labour union activities across the province to make the legislation an issue in the next provincial election. The NDP under leader Andrea Horwath have a chance at forming the government or, possibly holding the balance of power following the next provincial election.

Getting more NDP MPPs into the provincial legislature is the key to getting "anti-scab legislation" in Ontario, he said.

France Gelinás, the NDP MPP representing the Nickel Belt riding in Northern Ontario told the crowd she has seen first hand the damage the lack of replacement worker legislation can have on a community.

A year-long strike at Vale Inco was made all the more bitter by the use of replacement workers, which pitted father against son and neighbour and against neighbour.

Picket lines are far more peaceful and labour disputes are more likely to get resolved when anti-replacement- worker legislation is in place, she said.

There were no incidents at the picket line during Monday's rally and a company spokesman said he is aware of the rally being planned for mid-September.

"Our primary concern is for the safety of our employees and we want to make sure that we continue to meet the needs of our customers," he said. "We also have to remember shareholders who are looking for a return on their investment," he said.

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