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LOCAL NEWS

Steelworkers trying to get mills running

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On Friday, July 23, the United Steelworkers held an information meeting with its Lillooet members to give an update on the bargaining situation with Aspen Planers.

“This is the first opportunity we’ve ever had in seven months to present the company’s demands to our members,” said Marty Gibbons, President of the United Steelworkers Local 1-417.

According to a press release, the Steelworkers only received a list of demands from Aspen Planers a short time ago.

One of the demands set forth by Aspen Planers is an 11-year wage agreement with no wage increases for at least four years. The United Steelworkers have countered with a proposal for a four-year agreement with a two-year wage freeze. The Steelworkers’ proposal includes deferrals of wages, holiday pay, stat holidays, etc, – calculations amounting to a 20 per cent reduction of wages according to the press release. These deferrals would be repaid after the company starts making money, says Gibbons.

“If what we’re proposing with these reductions won’t work over a four-year term, they aren’t going to work over an 11-year term.” said Gibbons.

Gibbons explained that the goal of the United Steelworkers is to keep forest jobs in Lillooet.

“Our members are telling us what to do and they want to go back to work. If this is about getting the site up and running, we’ve provided a mechanism for the company to do that.”

The Steelworkers’ press release also states that many members feel they are being blamed for the mill not starting.

This, according to Gibbons, is not true.

“We want to make it very clear that we’ve been told directly by the company that we’re just one piece of the puzzle. All the pieces need to come together and First Nations are in that group, forestry is in that group, suppliers, loggers, everything. We’re prepared to work with them. We’ve offered them significant savings and they just haven’t shown any interest in that. They’re trying to take us long term into something that is not acceptable.”

Gibbons says that Aspen Planers is just negotiating with the Lillooet plant at this time. “They started negotiating only for Savona, but now are negotiating with only Lillooet. It’s very confusing.”

“We’re taking the position that we’re all one, we’re united. The bargaining together gets places up and running,” Gibbons says.

The Bridge River-Lillooet News did contact Aspen Planers for a comment on their demands, but did not receive a reply by press time.

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