



Steelworkers reach agreement with WFP

Four years: Deal gives contract language improvement for members, avoids concessions, but no big gains in salary

BY LEXI BAINAS, THE CITIZEN AUGUST 25, 2010

Workers and management are hoping that four years of labour peace in the woods will help boost the forest industry.

The United Steelworkers, Local 1-1937 and Western Forest Products Inc. announced this week that they have reached a four-year collective agreement.

It was ratified resoundingly by the union membership, who voted 82.4 per cent in favour of acceptance.

About 2,400 Western hourly and contractor employees are covered under this contract, which will expire on June 15, 2014.

"This is great news for our employees, customers, investors, and communities," Western President and CEO Steve Frasher said. "This is an important next step in our continuing efforts to recover from the worst market conditions the industry has experienced in a generation."

B.C.'s coastal forest industry has gone through some rough years, emerging much changed, with Western as the power on the coast and many former big-name players no longer on the scene at all.

"Throughout these difficult last few years our employees and the United Steelworkers union have been strong partners as we have worked to improve margins, manage production and inventory, and find new market opportunities. Our last two profitable quarters reflect this successful joint effort," Frasher said.

Negotiations have changed considerably from the 1970s and 80s when a group called Forest Industrial Relations bargained for all the coastal companies.

Darrel Wong, President of USW, Local 1-1937, was on the Union's negotiating committee, and said he is pleased with the results of the referendum ballot.

"The collective agreement gives the company and the union a four year period of industrial peace. There are signs that the coastal forest industry is emerging from a prolonged crisis, and hopefully in four years' time, our membership will be able to benefit from a healthy forest industry," he said.

The collective agreement that was negotiated with Western provides for improvements in several areas: wages, benefits, union security and severance pay for permanent partial closures in both logging

