

Local forestry workers take strike vote

By [Jade Swartzberg - Merritt Herald](#)

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Merritt forestry workers seeking similar contracts with workers in Northern British Columbia cast their votes on Friday on whether or not to strike along with other workers in Kamloops, Kelowna, the Okanagan and Cranbrook.

“The big issue here is that as union members in Merritt and the Southern Interior we’re seeking equality with workers in the North,” said Marty Gibbons, United Steelworker president of the Local 1-417.

Local 1-417 members have been without a collective agreement for two years since theirs expired in 2009. Since that time the union has completed agreements around the province with Canfor, Conifer, West Fraser and coastal employers. The only employment group left to ratify the pattern agreement contract is the IFRLA, the employment group representing interior forest companies such as Aspen Planers, Apsen-Industries and Tolko.

Instead of granting forestry workers the same contract it granted employees in the north, the IFRLA is offering them a reduced version of that contract, said Gibbons.

“We have attempted to bargain with them unsuccessfully and now they have left us with the only option remaining which is to take a strike vote,” he said.

Results of the strike vote, which was conducted across the region should be in by the end of the week.

Almost three thousand forestry workers would participate should a strike be called affecting mills in the Merritt area such as Tolko-Nicola, Aspen Planers and Aspen Industries. Other mills that would be affected include Tolko Heffley Creek, West Fraser Chasm and a number of Tolko mills in the Okanagan.

Gibbons would not discuss differences between the contract signed in the north and the one the IFRLA is offering to Local 1-417 members, but said the forestry workers are not happy with the inequality.

“The membership is very angry with the company’s position that workers in the south are worth less than workers in the north,” said Gibbons. “The IFRLA has waded in the bushes for everyone else to finish signing the contracts and then is of the very deluded opinion that they’re going to get more and it’s a dangerous game they’re playing.”

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