

Local forestry workers vote in favour of strike

By [Jade Swartzberg - Merritt Herald](#)

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Forestry workers across the region sent a clear message to employers last week by voting 95 per cent in favour of strike action.

With this strike mandate from the members, union representatives will be returning to the bargaining table today in hopes that the IFRLA, the employment group representing interior forest companies such as Aspen Planers, Aspen-Industries and Tolko, will pay attention and grant local workers the same contract it granted employees in the north, said Marty Gibbons, United Steelworker president of the Local 1-417.

“Whether we strike or not is going to be up to the companies,” said Gibbons.

Gibbons said about 80 per cent of the union members from Clinton, B.C. to Cranbrook, B.C. turned out for the vote that was completed over the last two weeks. Of the 80 per cent of voters, 95 per cent voted in favour of a strike.

“I think it’s very possibly one of the strongest strike mandates we’ve ever had,” said Gibbons.

Local 1-417 members have been without a collective agreement for two years since the last one 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 that refused to ratify the pattern agreement contract was the IFRLA, which offered a reduced version of the contract granted to forestry workers in the the north.

Gibbons said union representatives have attempted to bargain with the companies unsuccessfully and were left with no option other than taking a strike vote. Now that local workers have made it clear they are not happy with the inequality, he said the the possibility of a strike will depend on whether the companies agree to sign the pattern agreement contract already ratified by other employment groups.

“The workers were very clear,” said Gibbons. “They are not interested in taking anything less than anyone else and if the company continues to push their agenda to create second class citizens in the south, there will be a strike.”

Almost three thousand forestry workers would participate if a strike is called affecting mills in the Merritt area such as Tolko-Nicola, Aspen Planers and Aspen Industries.

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