

BC INTERIOR

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BC INTERIOR FOREST INDUSTRY NEGOTIATIONS CONCLUDE AFTER NEARLY TWO YEARS OF TALKS

With nearly two years of collective bargaining with a number of BC interior forest products manufacturing companies finally behind them, the United Steelworkers BC Interior Bargaining Committee is standing down after the last round of main table bargaining has been completed. On May 25th, IFLRA Directors—representing Tolko Industries, Weyerhaeuser, Tembec, West Fraser, Atco Lumber, Galloway Lumber, Aspen Planers, and Springer Creek Forest Products—voted in favour to accept the deal ratified by Steelworkers in the Cranbrook, Kamloops and Kelowna regions earlier in the month.

This final approval concludes a lengthy bargaining process for BC Interior forest workers that not only stretched out for nearly twenty-four months, but extended in to all regions of the province. Beginning with Canadian Forest Products in February 2010, the BC Interior Bargaining Committee established a pattern of improved working conditions and benefits that set the foundation for agreements that were negotiated elsewhere in the province. Although main table bargaining has now concluded, the BC Interior Bargaining Committee remains on standby to assist interior Local Unions with their remaining Independents.

In July 2010, the Steelworkers came to agreement with Vancouver Island based Western Forest Products and in August a tentative agreement with northern interior Conifer member companies was reached. Negotiations concluded with Forest Industrial Relations in September and many coast-based logging contractors followed suit by signing ME2 agreements based on either the FIR or Western deal. In the middle of October, the Steelworkers came to terms with Interior-based West Fraser in five separate bargaining sessions for five of their sawmill and plywood operations. And negotiations began in earnest with IFLRA in early 2011 and a deal was finally agreed to after much deliberations with the help of mediation later in April.

While the BC Interior Bargaining Committee is very satisfied with the enhancements to the collective agreements negotiated as a packaged-pattern across a number of bargaining tables over a twenty-four month period, they are well aware that there is room for future improvements to these agreements once the BC forest sector recovers. Steelworkers will be fully prepared to speak for BC forest workers again when agreements expire in the interior on June 30, 2013.

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