

Workers of the Thunder Bay Bowater Sawmill

Do we need or want a union? What will a union do for myself and my family, and my co-workers? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a union in both the short term and long term? These are important questions on everyone's mind today. To answer these and many other questions we can take a look back at our brief four year history at the Bowater Thunder Bay Sawmill.

In the beginning attitudes were both positive and optimistic. The mill was new and so were we and we all had something to prove. We wanted to make our new facility into a world class operation that we could all be proud of. In the beginning to be the best at what we did was our goal.

Through teamwork and skill we soon became one of Eastern Canada's top lumber manufacturing sawmills. This high ranking was achieved by all of us working collectively. We were tops in all the right areas, safety, productivity and most importantly profitability. All of this was accomplished during a time in which our industry was facing unprecedented crises in the softwood lumber industry. The well known factors were mill closures, the softwood lumber tariff, the shrinking U.S. dollar, and the rising Canadian dollar, the decrease in housing start up's all helped to contribute to the crisis.

During all the bad news around us, we as workers continued to not only meet but often exceed our sawmill targets. As people with livelihoods to worry about, the sound performance of our mill provided some stability in the midst of growing mill closures and layoffs surrounding us. Despite all of this, during our first three years of operation we

worked as a team and posted hundreds of thousands in monthly profits for our mill, and we continue to do the same today.

With results like that, one would think, that the workplace issues we face each and every day were being addressed and dealt with by our supervisors in an efficient and professional manner. On the labour side terms like “as good as or better” “top quartile” and “industrial leaders” etc....were often heard when discussing our workplace issues. We as workers were told that you have the best wages, best benefits and best employee handbook language. Remember “as good as or better!”

Now let’s talk about what is presently happening at our Bowater Sawmill today. The only means of representation for the workers is our existing Employee Committee. In the beginning this was a good idea, however over the last four years, this committee has become an increasingly ineffective means of protecting the rights of us workers. This type of worker representation is provided by concerned workers who mean well and try their best to succeed. However without the experience or training, how can this committee be expected to perform successfully? More importantly, how can we as workers allow this to continue to be our only means of recourse in times of disagreement with management’s actions and decisions?

Back to the pending question on everyone’s mind, **“Do we need or want a union?”** Take a few minutes to think about what has already been mentioned here and of your own experiences as a Bowater Sawmill employee over the last four years. The logical conclusion you arrive at is **YES**, we do need a union. Do we deserve a union? **YES**, we deserve to be represented with a strong voice that will make our management team both listen and act on our concerns. We want a partner that will demand equality

and fairness for our workers. Joining the CAW Union will provide what we need and want for our futures.

CAW is not only Canada's largest private sector union but is also Canada's most progressive union when it comes to workers rights, protecting social programs, and defending manufacturing jobs in this country. *Please consider the following points before making an educated decision on whether or not to become a CAW Union Member.*

1. The CAW offers a system that allows the workers to control and steer our own direction when it comes to contract language and will provide professional guidance and assistance on a regular basis with respect to workplace issues and concerns. We can further be expected to be treated with professionalism and respect both collectively and individually. CAW also has its own legal department fully staffed to work with us should we need their advice or assistance.
2. Benefits for all employees have dramatically been rolled back, costing you upwards of \$1000.00 or more each year depending on your level of benefit needs. Even before the cutback the consensus was that our benefit package was not "as good or better" than our peer workers at other facilities. Many had hoped that with our success, we would see improvements made to our benefit plan and not the significant rollback that was forced upon us. Having a legally binding collective agreement in place with language that defines and protects benefits that we have and would prevent arbitrary claw backs by our employer.

3. This decision to join the CAW is an opportunity to form a partnership with a progressive thinking union that has a system designed to improve worker rights. The CAW does not support suspension as a method to correct or alter the performance of workers. Instead, CAW believes in educating employees who are performing below acceptable standards. Educating workers to correct and better their work performance is a method that benefits both the worker and the company and is a method that can be applied to all areas including Health and Safety issues.
4. Conflict resolution procedures provided in our employee handbook were set out to allow us an avenue for redress when we felt we were being treated improperly. While this procedure on paper may seem appropriate, in the four years this workplace has operated not one decision has ever been reversed. Decisions were supposed to be fair and impartial, this is not happening. How can you as a worker expect to be treated fairly when the judge has already ruled prior to your hearing? As workers our only real chance at fair representation is through a recognized grievance procedure with elected workplace representatives working on your behalf, side by side with CAW National Representatives and Departments.

DON'T WE ALL DESERVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO TELL OR EXPLAIN OUR SIDE OF ANY STORY?

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