

Defending the Spirit of '46 Makes Us What We are Today

By

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It is a matter of great joy to be here together to celebrate the historic achievement made by the generation of steel and auto workers 60 years ago when they launched, sustained and won the strike which established our unions and the conception of rights which has served us well since then.

It is a matter of great pride that we are able to celebrate the spirit of '46 not as something from the past, but as something we have brought into the present with our own principled stand against the CCAA fraud, to defend today what belongs to us by right.

For us, the spirit of '46 is the spirit of sacrifice and uniting in action in defence of the rights of all. It is the spirit of basing ourselves on our own strength - the strength of our numbers, organization and our own intelligence behind the justice of our cause, with full confidence that together we have the acquired knowledge and ability to identify what is possible within very complicated and difficult situations, and then achieve it.

Just as in '46 when the entire media and prejudice of those days was arrayed against the workers, we too had to contend with the barrage of disinformation and attempts to portray us a troublemakers, spoilers, intransigent and incite us to fight amongst one another instead of

focussing our energies to win the justice of our cause. But we prevailed in 1946 and we prevailed all over again in 2006. Moreover, defending the spirit of '46 makes us what we are today.

What did we win then and now?

The conditions in 1946 were not the same as today but there is one similarity I would like to highlight which I think is the essence of both fights: the need to successfully fight for our unions as the defence organizations of the workers' interests within a society that guarantees the rights of all. This is in essence what was won in '46 and it is the fight we have taken up all over again.

It is true that one of the aims of the CCAA frauds today is to get concessions from the workers, lower wages and eliminate benefits and pensions. But we are also very aware of the fact that the aim behind this is to destroy the unions as defence organizations of the workers, as instruments which can realize the workers' slogan: An Injury to One is an Injury to All - All for one and One for All.

This is a concerted assault of not only corporations across the board but of governments at all levels. It is being done by surreptitiously introducing new arrangements which, in the name of increasing productivity and efficiency, permit corporations to act with impunity. It is done by passing laws which dismantle health and safety regulations in the name of eliminating red tape, or corporate and government support for company unions such as the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC). It is also done through so-called guest worker programs which

seek to deprive the most vulnerable workers of any mechanisms on the basis of which they can defend their rights to adequate wages and safe working conditions. It is done by targeting national minority workers, the First Nations, racially profiling Arabs, South Asians and Muslims, criminalizing our youth, discriminating against women and on the basis of sexual orientation and, most dangerous of all, taking us into unjust wars.

The CCAA is clearly one of the ways in which corporate fraud is carried out and we have stood firm against it, giving it no legitimacy whatsoever and we were right.

Once again, just as the steelworkers in '46 showed what Canadian workers are made of, our generation has shown that it is made of the same stuff and watch out!

We have just started! We will continue to stand guard for our rights and the rights of all and not permit the destruction of our unions, our environment or the annexation of Canada itself.

Furthermore, we will make sure we take up the defence of the rights of all under the dangerous conditions which are being created with the new North American union and attempts to make us think that other workers within the country and abroad are our enemy.

This celebration is the first time we've had the opportunity to gather since we signed the new contract and gave no concessions in the CCAA fraud. I would like to take the opportunity to pay our deepest respects to the generation which waged the historic struggles in '46 and the generations which followed, and to all current and retired steelworkers who took up the spirit of

'46, defended our rights today and are building our union to protect our unity and the justice of our cause. Steel, as you know, is the symbol of a modern society. We are and have always been proud steelworkers, more determined today than ever to stand our ground and in this way make our contribution to the society as a whole.

In the struggle against the CCAA fraud, in spite of the worry imposed on us by virtue of the uncertain future, we did not flinch. We were never rattled because our cause was just. From the outset, we reiterated what the generation which waged the struggle in '46 taught us: our security lies in our fight for what is right. It is not pensions per se, which are never enough and which the capitalists will never let up in trying to take away. It does not lie in air tight contract language which can be interpreted this way and that way. No. It lies in our unity and struggle in defence of our rights and the justice of our cause.

Knowing we are together sharing the same fate, fighting to improve our lot and the lot of our parents and children and the same for all, once everything is said and done, this is a source of great joy, it is what gives us courage. It provides us with convictions and enables us to avert all the provocations and attempts to dishearten us and get us to lose our bearings.

This is the spirit of '46. It is what we have learned all over again. We won in '46! We won once again in 2006! We appreciate the struggle of '46 all the more, knowing what it takes to stay the course and we prevailed. We gave no concessions! We now have a contract we can live with. We have no illusions that we can now sit on our back sides and contract language will look after us. No, we continue to build our union to look after us.

All for one and one for all! Let us together take a bold step in defence of the rights of all!

Thank you all for your contribution to this celebration and to our struggle. Let us appreciate this fabulous photo display with renewed appreciation and enjoy this very well deserved celebration!