

Safety and freedom to choose at center of Rempel strike ends

by Marco Procaccini

Safety and freedom to choose overtime work were at the heart of the grueling strike by Teamsters Local 213 members at Rempel Bros. Concrete facilities across the Lower Mainland. But despite some concerns, the overall results are being celebrated as a victory.

win is the language on securing work and scheduling of work and contracting out.”

The members walked off the job after failing to get the company to stop their requirements on cement truck drivers to work up to 14 hours per day without breaks—a violation of not only the collective agreement, but labour standards laws as well—in addition to forcing drivers to work six days a week.

Teamsters Rep Barry Capozzi was on the front lines of the dispute as well. “The real issue for us (was) the mandatory Saturdays (requirement),” Capozzi said, adding that the decision

The five-week strike, which started in mid-May, ended when the 160 members returned to work June 28 after ratifying a new tentative deal by about 70 per cent.

“We got a four-year deal with wage increases of 14 per cent,” said Teamsters Local 213 rep Tony Smith. “But the real

whether to work overtime should be the right of the worker to choose. “If a guy refuses, he gets disciplined. This is the main point. We (wanted) improvement in scheduling; the company (wanted) concessions.”

Bosses claimed the mandatory overtime was due to a shortage of trucks and a long wait list in getting new ones. The demand for more vehicles and cement has been attributed to a whole series of major projects by the provincial government coming on line since 2017—including the Vancouver Broadway Corridor SkyTrain line, new Pattullo Bridge and George Massey Tunnel replacement and DeltaPort expansion.

Complicating the issue is that the Lehigh Hanson Materials Company, Rempel’s parent firm, also owns Ocean Concrete and Allied Ready-Mix divisions and uses all three companies’ facilities interchangeably—as if it is one operation. Teamsters Local 213 members also work at Ocean and Allied: 110 at the former; 24 at the latter. Although they were not on strike, they honoured Rempel picket lines and refused to process material at their locations as well. That stopped operations at an additional six facilities, bringing the total to 12—which supply a whopping 35 per cent of concrete to construction sites across the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley.

“That was a real decisive factor,” Smith said. “They (bosses) tried to get an injunction against us picketing Ocean and Allied



L-R: Roger Van Veen, (Allied Ready Mix Concrete); Graeme Collins, (Rempel Bros. Concrete); Dave MacArthur, (Allied Ready Mix Concrete); Barry Capozzi, Business Representative; Mark Strath, (Allied Ready Mix Concrete); Rob Gregson, (Allied Ready Mix Concrete); Mike Murphy, (Ocean Concrete); and Louis Woudsma, (Rempel Bros. Concrete).



Image by Francisco Anzola, FlickrR



Teamsters Local 213 members on the picket line at Ocean Concrete on Vancouver's Granville Island.

“But the real win is the language on securing work and scheduling of work and contracting out.”

yards. But we proved they were using all of them as if they were one company. So we won.”

Adding to the dispute was pressure from industry sources complaining about the shortage of concrete delaying many projects, although many sectors of the industry were supportive of the Teamsters Local 213 members.

Capozzi says it’s unfortunate, albeit inevitable, that the dispute created the concrete shortage but insists boss intransigence and insistence on imposing such unsafe conditions on the workers was the cause. That intransigence has both Smith and Capozzi speculating the significant, but not overwhelming, support for the new deal.

“The way we’ve been treated over the last few years has created a sense of frustration that’s been brought to the bargaining table,” Capozzi said. Smith adds, “there’s still concern about what the company may try to do with contracting work to the subsidiaries (Rempel, Ocean and Allied),” although



the union’s victory in the injunction case has stopped this practice. “There’ll be a lot less intermingling because of this.”

Both say the main force behind getting through the strike and getting an overall satisfactory contract was the solidarity of the members at all three firms. “The crews held it together really well,” Smith said.

