

The Public Service Alliance of Canada leaves out or misrepresents key facts in its campaign against the Ekati mine

Rough Diamonds

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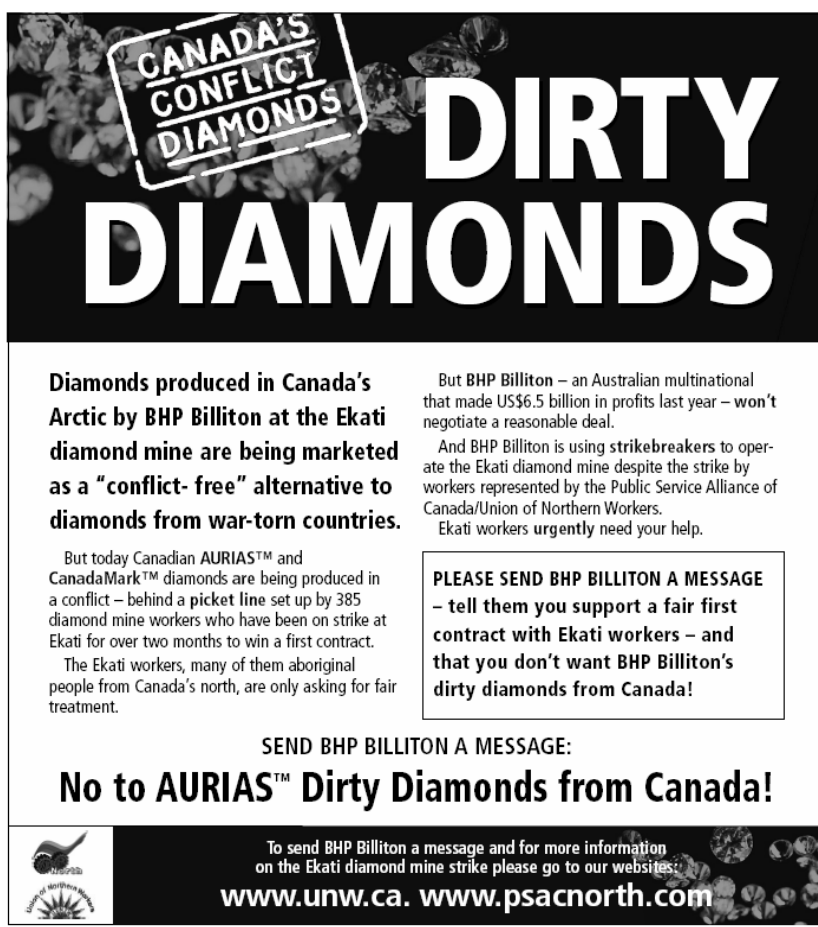
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All is not what it seems in the upside-down world of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC). The union, which represents more than 100,000 federal civil servants, is busy using dues collected from government union monopolies to establish a bigger base in the private sector.

Part of that expansion is the union's foray into mining at the Ekati diamond mine, approximately 300 kilometres northeast of Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories. PSAC has been on strike at the mine since April 7, a strike the union has been maintaining despite failing support among union members.

Last week, PSAC ads in The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times asked Americans to boycott Ekati diamonds. This "Dirty Diamonds" campaign moved to Canada this past weekend, with information pickets outside select jewellery stores. The ad copy says Ekati stones are "conflict diamonds" because they "are being produced in conflict -- behind a picket line set up by 385 diamond mine workers ..."



DIRTY DIAMONDS

Diamonds produced in Canada's Arctic by BHP Billiton at the Ekati diamond mine are being marketed as a "conflict-free" alternative to diamonds from war-torn countries.

But today Canadian AURIAS™ and CanadaMark™ diamonds are being produced in a conflict – behind a picket line set up by 385 diamond mine workers who have been on strike at Ekati for over two months to win a first contract.

The Ekati workers, many of them aboriginal people from Canada's north, are only asking for fair treatment.

But BHP Billiton – an Australian multinational that made US\$6.5 billion in profits last year – won't negotiate a reasonable deal.

And BHP Billiton is using strikebreakers to operate the Ekati diamond mine despite the strike by workers represented by the Public Service Alliance of Canada/Union of Northern Workers.

Ekati workers urgently need your help.

PLEASE SEND BHP BILLITON A MESSAGE – tell them you support a fair first contract with Ekati workers – and that you don't want BHP Billiton's dirty diamonds from Canada!

SEND BHP BILLITON A MESSAGE:
No to AURIAS™ Dirty Diamonds from Canada!

To send BHP Billiton a message and for more information on the Ekati diamond mine strike please go to our websites:
www.unw.ca. www.pscnorth.com

Conflict diamonds? In Canada?

Americans, Canadians and Ekati miners need to know the truth.

For example: the notion that the diamonds produced at the mine rate the conflict label is absurd. The United Nations defines conflict diamonds as "[originating] from areas controlled by forces or factions opposed to legitimate and internationally recognized governments, and are used to fund military action" The only

factions at work here are union leaders desperate to maintain a strike and a union presence.

In its rush to grab the moral high ground, PSAC conveniently leaves out or misrepresents key facts. If there is a conflict at Ekati, it's a conflict the PSAC is legally responsible for.

On June 7, the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories decided that "a series of

unlawful activities has been proven." Among other things, PSAC representatives and supporters were found to have uttered threats of violence against Ekati employees, their families and personal property, made racist remarks and unlawfully interfered with the operations of other businesses.

Another example: PSAC's claim that it has a picket line of 385 miners expressing union solidarity is blatantly false.

PSAC members have been crossing the line since Day 1, and more than 140 of 385 unionized miners (almost 40%) have been back at work. Others are working elsewhere -- possibly to avoid the intimidating and unlawful conduct of their own union. Considering this "fear factor," it's legitimate to question just how many unionized Ekati employees (PSAC members and non-members) truly support PSAC's leadership, as only a minority are actually picketing.

But PSAC employees (not miners) picketing a Vancouver store toed the party line. They claimed the picket line is 385-strong and "not one worker has crossed the line." When challenged on the accuracy of these claims, they could only say the information was provided by "the PSAC Local president up north."

In other words, PSAC members are apparently misinforming consumers -- and PSAC leaders appear to be misleading them.

Since the beginning, PSAC has been attempting to achieve picket line compliance by threatening unionized Ekati employees with fines for working and court action to collect -- a tactic also being used on PSAC's Ottawa members.

But the threat of fines looks like deliberate intimidation and misrepresentation, since PSAC's board of directors has known for almost two years they can't collect.

An internal PSAC memo from then-president Nycole Turmel (Sept. 17, 2004) informed the board of "a legal opinion that clearly and without ambiguity" concluded the union has "no legal ability to enforce the collection of fines" in higher courts.

The essence of this legal opinion has been reported by the media and widely circulated, but PSAC has yet to align its disciplinary actions with this legal opinion, let alone release a contrary opinion to correct the misunderstanding it created for its own members with the above memo.

LabourWatch has encouraged PSAC to produce the legal opinion and cease intimidating its members with fines. Despite repeated opportunities, PSAC has not done so.

In April, Ms. Turmel and I wrote columns about fines for Canadian HR Reporter. Ms. Turmel had known of this legal opinion for more than 18 months, yet she didn't say a word, stating only that the issue is "arguably unsettled."

That's a far cry from "clearly and without ambiguity," as stated in her memo.

This pattern continued in PSAC's "Open Letter to the Citizens of Yellowknife" (June 9) and a Vancouver Sun op-ed (June 13). Both maintained the theme of silence, stating only that fines, "... while regrettable, [are] hardly the point."

So, what is the point? PSAC says it is the "replacement workers." But in this case, it's PSAC's own members, labelled as "irresponsible," "freeloaders" and "scabs," who are doing the work.

But PSAC's righteous invectives fall short of garnering sympathy since PSAC itself uses "replacement picketers." In fact, one Yellowknife reporter found that 75% of Ekati pickets were "replacement picketers," not miners expressing their solidarity.

Ah, so all is not what it seems to be. Future PSAC statements should be held similarly suspect until truly proven.

LabourWatch supports the role of unions and recognizes their benefits. But we can't stand by while a union intimidates its own members. And we can't condone exaggerated and untruthful messages to the public.

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