

Odd cat is sticking up for worker mice

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When cats pretend to defend mice, the mice should watch out.

That's the lesson from a June 1 article in *The Vancouver Sun* by John Mortimer of the Canadian Labour Watch Association. Mortimer's group, funded by employer organizations that don't like unions, would have readers believe it is actually trying to help workers at the Ekati diamond mine, who have been on strike since April 7.

Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth.

Those workers are members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada and they joined the union to improve their wages and working conditions. After 15 months of fruitless negotiations with mine owner BHP Billiton, the workers struck to try to win a fair wage increase, job security, seniority and improved vacations.

"Unionization may have seemed like a good idea at the time," Mortimer wrote, before encouraging workers to cross their union's picket lines and telling them the union cannot penalize them if they do.

But it's not their union these workers are worried about, it is a ruthless employer that is using its unlimited resources to defeat the strike and break their efforts to win a first collective agreement.

Mortimer and his Labour Watch friends don't like the idea of workers getting together to demand fair treatment. That's why they try to change the argument from the benefits of unionization to whether unions can fine their members for crossing their own picket lines -- a situation that, while regrettable, is hardly the point.

It's no surprise that some workers, facing enormous employer demands and financial worries, would succumb to that pressure.

But the real penalty they face is not union fines but the loss of their own self-respect as fellow workers stand up to the employer to win the workplace protections that a union can provide.

So when employer-funded groups like Labour Watch claim to be simply "helping" employees like those at Ekati, those workers should understand that their anti-union activities are completely self-serving.

Guess which ones are the cats and which are the mice. It's rather obvious.

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