



# International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Vancouver Island

Quarterly Newsletter

Since 1902

## Bracing for the New Boss Posted By: Jason Youmans

The spectre of working life under the thumb of the Chinese government has pushed employees of a small Victoria electronics plant to seek union membership to ensure their rights are respected by the facility's new overseas bosses.

This week's drive to join International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers local 230 has been percolating since the former Honeywell Electronic Materials plant on Vanalman Avenue was purchased by China Silian Instrument Group in August of this

employees, as by the end of the membership drives first day, IBEW representatives manning a table in the Silian parking lot had signed cards for seven of the eight workers on the plant's first shift.

Employees of the Victoria facility, who work on a specialized line that manufactures sapphire wafers used in LED lights, declined to go on record for fear of being identified as a union organizer or sympathizer, but IBEW's Mann says they bring a laundry list of valid concerns—starting with job security.

An excerpt from Monday Magazine story (Sept. 25 – Oct. 1/08)



Brothers P. Ferguson and S. Kolic hold the Local 230 banner for the Silian employees as they come into work.

year, muddying the working waters for the facility's approximately 50 employees.

Silian is a manufacturing firm owned wholly by the government of the People's Republic of China, an industrial leviathan that employs almost 8,000 workers, mostly in the Chongqing industrial area of Sichuan province.

If successful, IBEW provincial organizer Jason Mann says the unionization of Silian's Victoria workforce may be the first time employees of an overseas enterprise owned by the Chinese state in North America have joined a trade union.

The prospect of organizing has clearly not been far from the mind's of Silian

member Gary Eakins, Sisters Cheryl Arseniuk and Anne Marie Vis, and of course campaign coordinator International Organizer Jason Mann, for reaching out to the Silian workers and letting them know that having a union in your workplace means greater safety, wages and benefits. Although the vote to represent these workers fell short we also need to thank the Silian workers who approached us and held faith that we could help create change and raise their standard of work and their lives, and we left those workers, and many other workers employed in the high-tech manufacturing sector with the message that the IBEW Local 230 is "the Right Choice" for this workforce.

## Autumn 2008

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### News/Notes:

Please be advised the IBEW Local 230 Office will be closed from noon on Dec. 24th and re-opening on Jan. 5th, 2009.

Included is pull tab card from the Public Compensation Coalition please read, sign and send it in. It benefits us all.

When paying Dues remember there is an increase of \$1.00 to the International to go towards Organizing beginning January 2009.

# Business Manager's Report



**Philip M. Venoit**  
Business Manager/Financial Secretary

It turns out the “free market” isn’t really free. **What turbulent times!** We witnessed a global economic crisis beginning with large and old banking or mortgage institutions like Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Lehman Brothers and Merrill Lynch go bankrupt or bailed out sending a ripple through Western

Europe and more recently resulting in tens of thousands of lay-offs in China due to the lack of U.S. consumer zest. This global financial crisis is the perfect example making it ever so much clearer that we truly live in a global marketplace. So, other than most of our own personal investments, how does/will this affect us? We’ve seen the initial negative effect since late in 2007 with speculative home buyers move from the Island to below the 49th, gone for now are the days of picking up the local newspaper to read of the Calgarian buying his 3rd Bear Mountain condo ‘cause he liked the view! Instead, that buyer has been looking at California, Arizona, Nevada and even Florida foreclosure opportunities, between the abundance of U.S. foreclosures and the buoyant Canadian dollar has resulted in a slowdown of the Island condo market, (for now). As a resource based Nation we’re also feeling the pinch of the U.S. housing slow-down, sending less aggregate, timber, and minerals (steel and copper) south, which has resulted in slowing other projects as well. **On the bright side** our construction contractors have secured the commercial, institutional, and industrial infrastructure work needed to support the residential growth we’ve seen over the past few years, and there is plenty of examples of that with; the work coming out of places like the new Cowichan Commons and Village Green in Duncan, the Victoria General Hospital and new Nurse Towers at the Royal Jubilee and the renewal of the Islands High voltage transmission systems, the marine section has secured some good long-term naval work as well, with other opportunities possibly coming from BC Ferries as they will continue to replace medium size ferries. Premier Campbell also indicated an emphasis in increased public infrastructure work to help offset any negative impact to the BC economy in his initial 10 point economic plan. So, although there are many indications to be concerned we have many examples of secured work over the near future.

**The Motion to close the Port Alberni Unit Meeting** due to poor attendance and financial cost to the Local to hold this meeting passed by 83% of the members and is awaiting approval from the International

Office, until then we will continue to hold this meeting, and I have full intentions to carry on holding “Information Meetings” 3 or 4 times each year for the members living and working in Port Alberni and the Pacific Rim, with this move we will be saving approximately 90% of the cost of the meeting and we will hopefully see a better turnout.

I attended the **United Way launch** in Victoria and while listening to the keynote speaker a resident who had made the Island his home since the early 70’s and having to face many personal challenges, more than seemed humanly fair, near the end of his story it hit very close to home for me when he told the folks in attendance his oldest son was an electrician and I realized also a Local 230 member. If you can spare the extra dollars to help out the 1 of 5 people in our Island communities who turn to the outreach programs supported by the United Way for help each year, I would urge you to do so. If your employer needs help in setting up for these deductions get them to call me in our office. For those that enjoy a good sports laugh we have a great United Way/ NFL video featuring Peyton Manning on the Local’s website, under the “Health” tab, then click on the “Community” button.

We are also hosting a **“Poor No More” video vignette** in the same area of our website, this vignette is the beginning of a video being shot around our Country highlighting the people who many would rather not see, those folks that are living in poverty in Canada today.

**We’ve written BC Transportation Minister Kevin Falcon** seeking funding commitments from the Provincial and Federal governments to upgrade the south island rail line and the creation of a Light Rail Transit (LRT) system as a replacement for the 30 buses and dedicated bus lanes currently on the City planner’s desk. This will mean more work for our members on the railway through increased maintenance and our construction contractors like Raylec Power or Emery Electric who perform a lot of the construction on rail signal lights, at the same time taking the high road on creating a better community to live in.

*From my family to yours Merry Christmas.*



**Brother Steve Hobbs** receives his Journeyman certificate from Nanaimo Branch Manager of Houle Electric, **Shawn Boyd**.



## A Letter

Minister of Transportation, Kevin Falcon

### Re: Victoria Needs Diversity in their Transportation System

Dear Sir,

Many successful North American cities provide an opportunity for visitors and workplace commuters to utilize a variety of ways to travel in and out of the core city to the outlying areas without using a personal vehicle. Whether it's by surface train, subway system or elevated train commuters will have options. The reasons for these alternate ways to travel are likely as diverse as the cities themselves however the one common theme of responsibility is their local, provincial/state, and federal governments built and/or maintained them to serve the people of the city.

Victoria is long overdue to upgrade the southern portion of the historic E&N Railway Line, and the reasons are as obvious and painful as the Colwood crawl, or the public outcry of "no carbon tax". We need to reduce our downtown arterial street congestion thereby limiting idling vehicles (which appears to have many governments at the legislative table drafting anti-idling laws), road maintenance, and unproductive wasteful time. We need to reduce the amount of parking spaces to allow for a larger residential footprint in the downtown area so downtown working people can choose to live downtown and reduce their personal living costs which also increases the downtown residential municipal tax base, and possibly most importantly we need to continue to reduce our carbon emissions by reducing the need for downtown working people to take their personal vehicles.

The growing population in the Westshore Communities is the catalyst for change and the reasons to pursue this very tangible and beneficial new outlook on our inter-community transportation system which

could serve Victoria, Esquimalt, View Royal, Langford and further north. With tens of thousands of people who currently live within walking distance of the Railway Line, and if we act quick enough while Langford has the property for a park and ride along the rail-line, so a Victoria light rail transit could further serve north island commuters as well.

In 2004 several municipal governments along with First Nations stepped up to the plate to help save this integral transportation system through the Island (Railway) Corridor Foundation. It is now time for our provincial and federal governments to do the same. One hundred and twenty years ago these governments entered into a partnership with Confederation and the E&N Railway was an important part of that deal, it is an absolute shame to walk along this railway and see its current condition, the time is now to invest in a new light rail transit system while the corridor is functional and still available.

My great-grandfather John Bell, maintained the Island railway tracks for over 30 some years after returning home from Vimy Ridge, but this letter is not about hanging onto heritage, this letter is about the vision our elected leadership should have for the future of the communities you have sworn



Brother Marv Bevridge from Southern Railway beside a crossing signal electrical cabinet.

an oath to serve. A vision which would have a practical purpose for everyone living in the southern Island today and for those that will choose our region to reside in the future. The south Island communities of Colwood and Langford have joined together to create an "Official Community Plan" (OCP), the OCP recognizes the Westhills development, the largest development to ever take place on Vancouver Island and it notes the train to be an integral part of that development. At the town hall meeting facilitated to lay-out the OCP participants conveyed that they currently needed alternate modes of transportation in and out the city of Victoria today! Light Rail Transit, Sea Bus whatever was needed but alternatives are needed today!

A further purpose to which many governments struggle with today and every government will struggle with in the future. Fossil fuel gas guzzling ozone depleting individual modes of transportation, we are all going to have to break-off our love affair with our vehicles and move towards modes of mass transportation. Many studies that support this approach throughout North America are over twenty years old and closer to home were commissioned prior to the World Exposition in 1986. My understanding is there are newer studies commissioned by the likes of BC Ferries to better understand Vancouver Island's growth and transportation needs into the immediate future which are supportive as well.

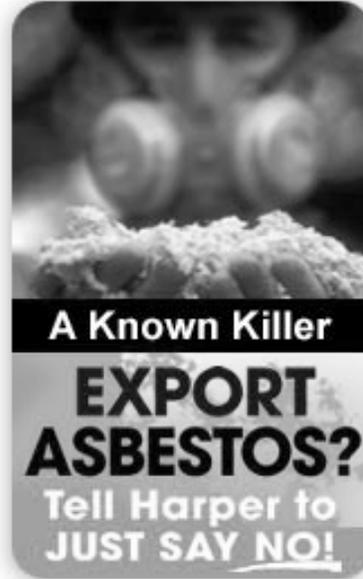
We are calling on you and the Provincial Government to contact your Federal counterpart(s) to begin the discussions with Via Rail and come up with the necessary funding to see this important transportation infrastructure for Victoria and southern Vancouver Island preserved and built upon. federal counterparts to do the same.

Sincerely, Philip Venoit, *Business Manager  
President, VI Council of Railway Unions  
Co-chair, VIRDI*

# Asbestos – The Politics And Economics Of An Industrial Disease

Asbestos is a mineral fiber that has been commonly used in a variety of building construction materials for insulation and as a fire-retardant, (insulation on all electrical conductors in the early decades of the 20th Century, likely all knob and tube wiring for example). The most dangerous fibres are too small to be visible. After they're inhaled, they can remain in the lungs indefinitely. Asbestos can cause lung cancer, mesothelioma (a cancer of the chest and abdominal linings), and asbestosis (irreversible lung scarring that can be fatal). Symptoms of these diseases don't show up until many years after initial exposure. Quebec, home to most of Canada's asbestos mines, has one of the highest rates of

mesothelioma on the planet. Yet the Canadian government refuses to even keep track of the growing numbers of Canadian workers who are sick and dying from asbestos-caused cancer. Canadians may think there is an Asbestos ban in Canada, but in November, 2006, the Federal Conservative Government published new regulations that "helpfully" point out all the places where asbestos can be used in this country. The list includes textiles, construction materials, such as drywall compound and spray-on insulation, and children's toys? A study by Professor Paul Demers at the University of B.C.'s school of environmental health and statistics from



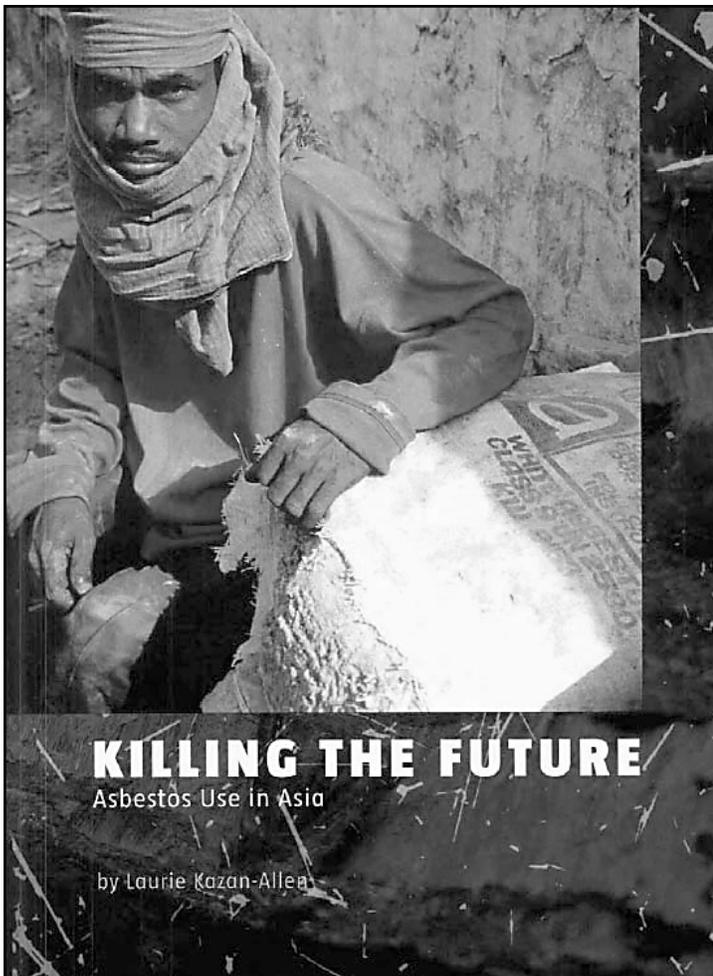
payers dollars and Canadian embassies to actively promote the sale of asbestos around the world. Construction and Shipyard workers throughout North America are aware of the potentially fatal health impact Asbestos can have on workers and we can't stop until the general public is fully aware of the potential health risks related to Asbestos.

Many Canadians think asbestos is already banned in Canada, and they'd be horrified to learn that successive federal governments have spent a fortune in taxpayers' money promoting the industry. Our foreign trade commissions soften up foreign customers and host asbestos-promotion events right in our embassies. The federal government has given approximately \$30-million to the industry directly in recent years. And our government eagerly supports the asbestos industry by sending teams of department of justice lawyers around the world like globe-trotting snake oil salesmen, to block countries from banning asbestos and to strong-arm small weaker countries into keeping asbestos off the international lists of hazardous materials like the Rotterdam Convention.

WorkSafeBC, predicts that more than 1,500 workers will die of asbestos exposure illnesses over the next five years.

Earlier this year, the All India Trade Union Congress, the second largest union in India, appealed for help from the Canadian Labour Congress in urging the Canadian government to stop exports of Canadian asbestos to India, calling the mineral "a major killer." Roughly 97 per cent of Canada's production (220,000 tons) of asbestos is exported — mostly to developing countries including India, Indonesia and Pakistan. Asbestos has been banned by nearly every developed country, as well as a growing number of developing nations. The World Health Organization has estimated as many as 100,000 people around the world die annually from asbestos-related diseases. The Canadian Cancer Society and other respected organizations have called for a ban on all forms of asbestos. But instead of banning asbestos, the Canadian government uses tax-

Recently at the latest Rotterdam Convention held in October, Local 230 joined with thousands of other Trade Unionists voices around the world to have asbestos listed as a toxic product which cannot be exported to developing countries without their prior, informed consent. The next step will be to call for the complete ban on this product at home.



## KILLING THE FUTURE

Asbestos Use in Asia

by Laurie Kazan-Allen