



Tree Worker's Industrial Group is a grassroots advocacy collective that is pushing for worker representation within tree planting. Since its founding in October 2018, TWIG has grown to include members from across Canada and has been involved in collective action at multiple planting companies: advocating and promoting the legal rights of workers, bringing awareness to sexual violence issues/aiding survivors; and returning over \$60,000 in stolen wages to the pockets of planters.

Our mission is to support workers from the bottom up, and to build solidarity and representation across company lines. We are volunteer-run and spearheading a sectoral culture shift. We aim to educate and empower workers, both to support each other, and to challenge the colonial, patriarchal and capitalist foundations of this industry. TWIG's membership is open to any silviculture employee. For more info find us on social media or visit our website:

treeworkersindustrialgroup.work

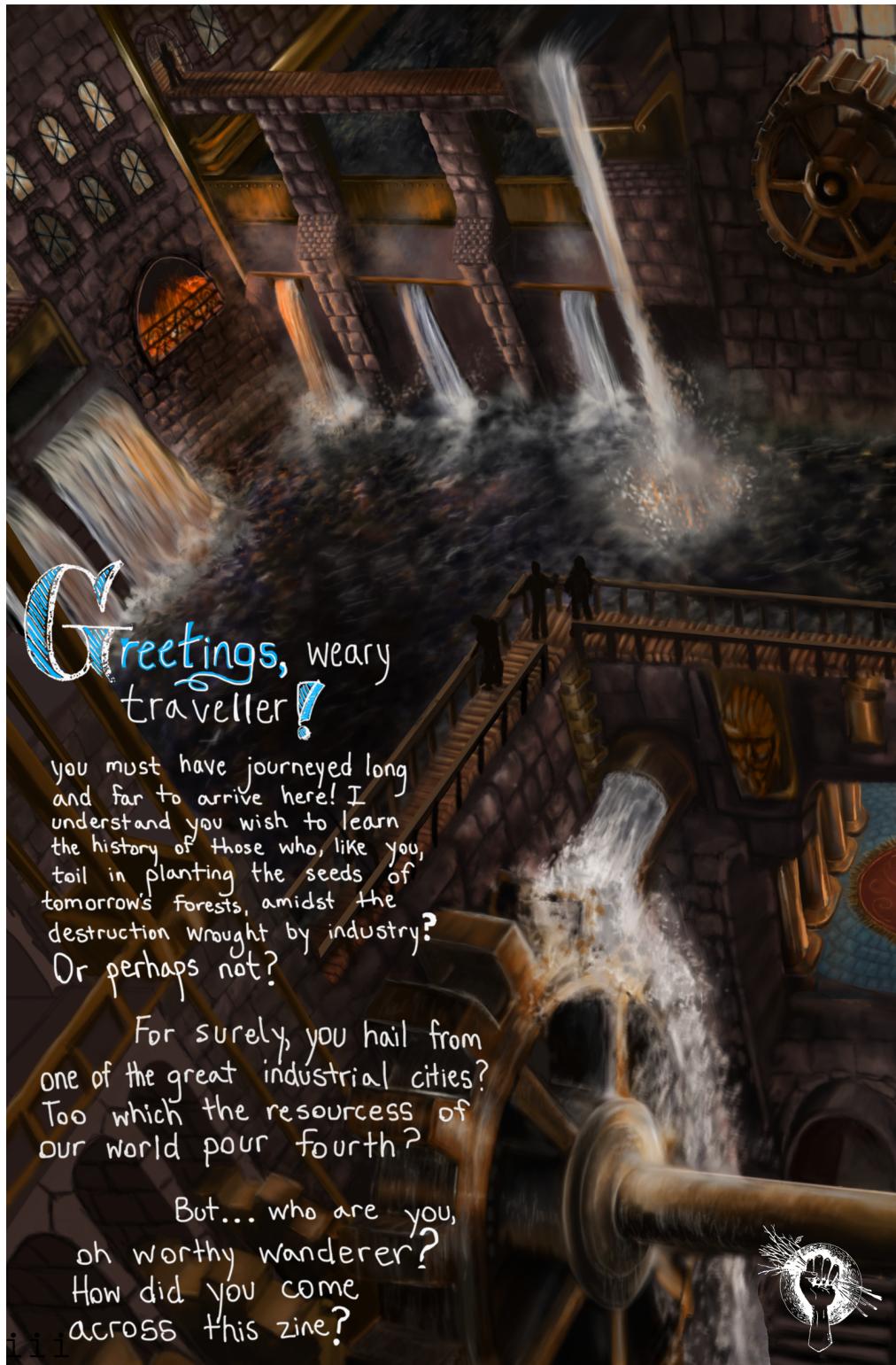
FIREWEED

A TREE PLANTING ZINE SERIES



VOL 20 No 22
PLANTER'S GUIDE





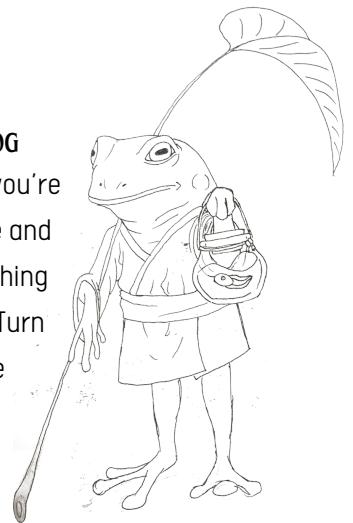
CHOOSE YOUR CHARACTER:

WARRIOR ROGUE

Choose this class if you're a treeplanter with an interest in organizing. Turn to page 13 to equip yourself!

FROG

Choose this class if you're just reading this zine and you don't know anything about treeplanting. Turn to page 16 to see the final boss!



HEAD OF WISDOM

Choose this character if you have a penchant for academia and an interest in policy-writing. Turn to page 7 to add a spell to your spell book!

TREE STORY 201

Treeplanting is a relatively new industry within forestry (silviculture), but to gain any understanding of resource-based industries within our North American resource colony ("Canada") we must first consider who owns the land...because **89% of the country is technically owned by the Queen of England, as "Crown Land"**. Conventionally, it is run by the government of Canada. This land was stolen from Indigenous peoples. It is controlled by two levels of Canadian government, with 41% of it federal, and 48% provincial. The government operates this land in the interests of massive capitalist resource companies, run by billionaires through oligopolies (for more on this, turn to page 16).

To understand how this model is allowed to exist is to understand the tacit institutional racism inherent to settler colonialism. **Content warning: we're discussing genocide.** Beginning in earnest in the 1500s, mostly white settlers arrived on Turtle Island (which was then British North America), in the hopes of creating a better life for themselves in this expansive "New World", ignoring or offering only tokenized respect for the Indigenous nations that were living here. Though there was some reciprocal integration of Europeans and indigenous nations (such as the Metis), the basis of settler colonialism is this nonreciprocal relationship, hinged on dispossession. In some places, treaties were signed and arrangements were made (though rarely upheld) between the colonial Canadian government and Indigenous nations. In others, the land was just taken, and the Indigenous nations "relocated" to reserves, which slowly became more widespread. Meanwhile, the Canadian state formed, including the RCMP (who were explicitly founded to enforce capital property rights and dispossess indigenous peoples), the Catholic-church partnered Residential School system (recently deemed by the UN to have constituted "cultural genocide"), and all the legal and financial infrastructure to ensure compliance with resource extraction.

However, when considering this past, it's important to note two things: Firstly that many indigenous communities did not accept this encroachment on their traditional lands and ways of life, and that there was, and still is, strong resistance against the colonial government. We encourage you to research these acts of resistance for yourself (suggested groups linked in the online version of this zine). Secondly, not all Indigenous communities or individuals are in opposition to logging, development, and other traditionally colonial operations, just as not all tree planters are critical of capitalism, state violence, or ecocide. **Neither indigenous-led resistance nor general worker resistance assemble from a place of homogenous understanding, experience, or identity.** They assemble from a place of shared principles, and they form when people take the initiative to act in solidarity with each other, and to organize.

So as we delve into the history of the industry, it is important for treeplanters to acknowledge that we are drawing our incomes from a system that is deeply, historically, and intentionally built on relationships of exploitation. And while we learn about our own exploitation and start to come together in solidarity to fight for better conditions, we must ensure that this solidarity doesn't let the limits of the past define our future.

Moving into the twentieth century, treeplanting became an industry starting in the 1930's. There were no regulations or company programs to replace what had been cut down, so planting trees existed as a fringe industry, for such purposes as creating windbreaks on farms. According to Brendan Sweeney, an industry economist, in the early to mid 20th century, the brutal nature of the job often resulted in labor shortages. "The use of prison labour was common during periods of labour scarcity, as was the use of women, teenagers and First Nations, who were paid a fraction of what tree planters employed directly by the [government] received." Capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy are intersecting systems, and so the term that emerged to

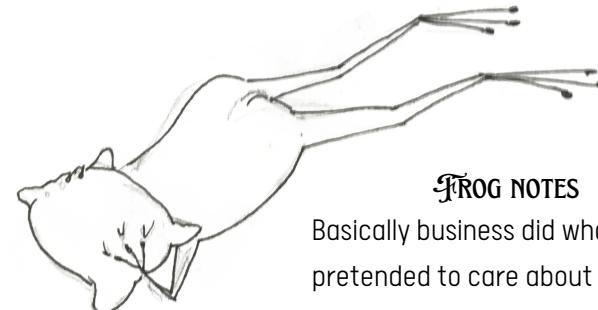
describe the workforce became “Indian-and-widow-work”. Demand continued to grow, accelerated by wars, and the capitalist system’s explicit preference was for all forests to be on “regrowth” cycles so that they could be easily accounted for on balance sheets (“**Liquidation of old growth forests**”); the current system wasn’t meeting that need. But then, moving into the 1970’s, draft-dodgers from the Vietnam war started moving to Canada, gaining employment in silviculture, and filling out the edges of the workforce. Out of this seemingly unlikely mix sprang a successful cooperative ecosystem, as “a significant proportion of tree planting work in British Columbia (as well as in the American Pacific Northwest) was carried out by worker cooperatives.” Cooperatives met the need for a few years, and cultivated a workforce of professional planters, who knew the ins-and-outs of the job.

Into the 1980’s, however, this workforce started to grow older, and less interested in the physical aspect of the job. **The question arose: How to reorganize the industry so that they cash in on their expertise without having to put a shovel in the ground?** This was, after all, the onset of sweeping economic reforms that you may know as:



HEAD OF WISDOM NOTES

The “neoliberal era”, a socioeconomic ideology marked by free-market orthodoxy, some domestic civil liberties, and imperialist foreign policy.

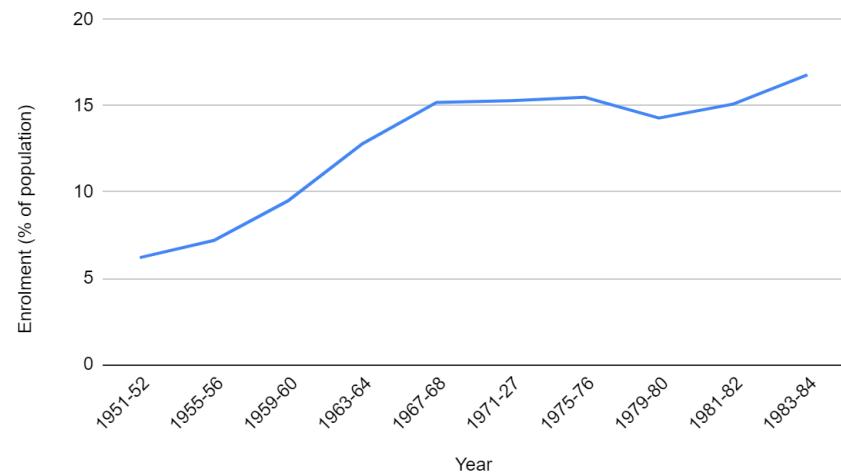


FROG NOTES

Basically business did whatever it wanted so long as it pretended to care about social justice, and the government changed its priority from funding public and social services to figuring out how to open up every possible inch of the country to resource extraction. .

So how does one cash in on tree-planting? Asked another way, if the coop members phased out of planting trees themselves, short of reverting to the traditional systems of using prison labor/etc, what other demographic could fill the gap? The answer came from a shift in another sector of the Canadian economy, as university enrolment had steadily been increasing, and with it a massive seasonal workforce of students emerged.

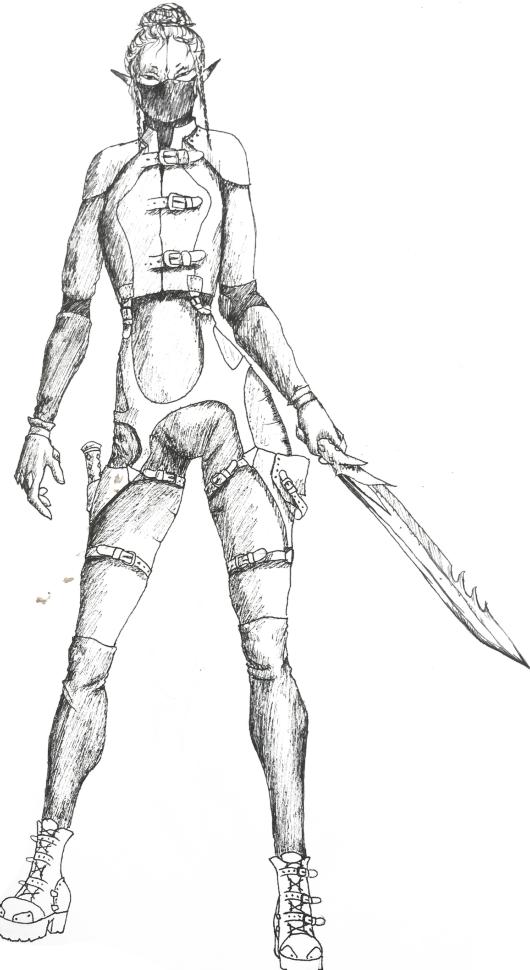
Enrolment rate of Canadian population 1951-1984



Data taken from: University Enrolment in Canada 1951-83 and Beyond
John Vanderkamp [1984]. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*

Those treeplanters who had worked in the cooperative model in the 70's began to found private enterprises, the modern contract system with the mills began to take shape, and "contractors relied almost exclusively on student labor. The proportion of female tree planters also grew to almost half of the labor force during this era". This new model has largely persisted up to the present state of the industry.

Thus concludes Treestory 201, as we have now arrived at the model of treeplanting that exists in our North American resource colony/Canada today. To learn about how this model works, you must learn treconomics!



WARRIOR ROGUE NOTES

Many of the professionalized planters who worked within the cooperative ecosystem founded their own private companies. Some of those in Western Canada maintained their network by forming the Western Forestry Contractors Association (WFCA)

TREECONOMICS 201:

(HEAD OF WISDOM: LEARN SPELL: "INDUSTRY CONTEXT")

The "forests" that we are planting as tree planters are part of a government required silviculture mandate to replant what is logged. This procedure legally began in 1987 as the "Crown Lands Act", which set up the current tenure system.

Logging companies hold specific tenures for either an area to be logged, or a volume amount that they are allowed to take from designated areas. The tenure system originated in 1865 in BC (home of Canada's forestry industry) and is a resource-specific transfer of rights. **The government gives companies, communities, or individuals access to Crown land in exchange for cold hard cash.** Land tenures are typically granted for specific timeframes, and are subject to renewal. As per capitalism, tenures are awarded through a bidding system, with the company who offers the government the most amount of money declared the winner. The bid includes stumpage (fee for each tree), merchantable timber (looking at size, quality, and the set price for those trees), plus sometimes also -bonuses- offered to the government. Sometimes tenure licenses are just directly awarded to a group, although these are mostly Indigenous communities.

Okay so, what trees can be cut and where? It varies provincially. In British Columbia, for example, this is determined by the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development. Tenures are typically volume- or area-based.

Volume-based means that companies are awarded licenses to cut a certain amount of timber. The location is determined by foresters and must be within specific Timber Supply Areas. There are often multiple smaller companies in one area.

Area-based means that companies are awarded exclusive rights to log a certain area. These companies are told how many trees they are allowed to take (Annual Allowable Cut) from a specific area (wood-lots, tree-farms).



HEAD OF WISDOM

NOTES

The same tenure system exists for other resource-based industries, including oil and gas..

WARRIOR ROGUE NOTES

Stumpage fee goes up,
stumpage fee goes down. Tree
prices stay pretty consistent.

The goal of major companies is to operate forests as money machines, which means turning them into long-term farms. Tree Farms are area-based tenures that are managed mostly by big timber companies who have the rights to cut a certain amount, replant, and repeat.



FROG NOTES

"They took all the trees
Put 'em in a tree museum
And they charged the people
A dollar and a half just to see 'em"

-Joni Mitchell

-Also basically this section, except in this case replace "museum" with home depot

These (very large) tracts of land were originally utilized to help build up rural BC. Companies were given extended contracts in exchange for a promise to build and run mills in their local communities, while the provincial regulations surrounding the Annual Allowable Cut were designed to avoid the boom and bust cycle for these communities, and in so doing create jobs, towns, and livelihoods based on these arrangements. **However, it's an unstable and quickly unraveling arrangement, as climate change is accelerating while forestry companies are actively destroying precious old growth carbon sinks and ravaging local communities for profit.** (For a more detailed account/Boss Battle, turn to page 16!)

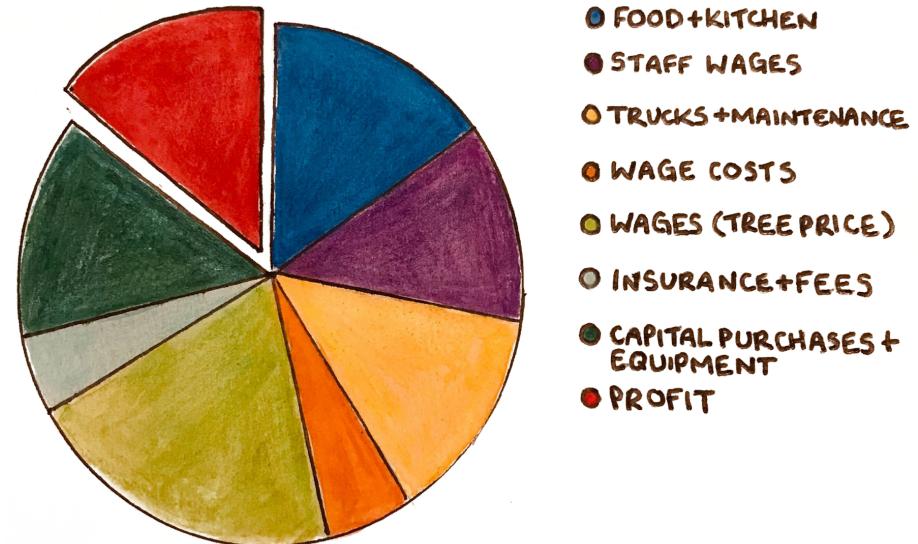
The timber companies were given the authority to manage these lands, so it's unsurprising that tree farms became a popular management strategy, as they have the highest rates of reforestation, so they can cut it down again. The government mandate for companies to replant merged seamlessly with capitalism's needs to place everything on a balance sheet, hence the trend to farms (and, you know, spraying the woods with glyphosate). Treeplanting is seen as the "silver bullet" to get everything on regrowth cycles reliably. However, the timber companies don't want to replant the trees themselves, so they outsource it, and that's where treeplanting companies come in to fill the gap. A lumber mill will log a forest, and get planting companies to anonymously bid for the contract to replant it. They then select the lowest bidder and award the contract. [Here's a recap from Treconomics 101](#) (which you can find on our website in the zine "Planter's Rights")



Let's say Colonial Mills Inc. has just logged 2,000,000 trees. They put the land they've just logged up for bidding, and a dozen different companies line up. These companies take a look at the land (hopefully...), estimate the cost to plant it/the profits they hope to make, and arrive at a number.

That number is the total price per tree for the bid, and it can be a wide range. In our example, Colonial Mills Inc. awards the contract to Rookie Mill Reforestation, the lowest bid, at a total price of \$0.46/tree.

$$(2,000,000 \text{ TREES}) \times (\text{BIDDING AT } \$0.46 \text{ TREE}) = \$920,000.00$$



That bid price accounts for all of the expenses relating to planting, such as wages, equipment, camp, and profit margin. **Only a fraction of it becomes the tree price you hear on the block.** How big or small is that fraction? Despite the entire model depending on you putting the trees in the ground, you'll almost never know. In most larger companies, even the supervisors aren't told what the bid price was. This is mostly in the interest of the lumber mills, who can continue to ensure companies try to under-bid each other to remain "competitive", with planters feeling the costs.

Just like the lumber mills, the aims of a typical capitalist tree planting company is to expand that profit margin. There are many ways to do this, and they range from the traditional (maximize production by any means possible, which shortens the season, and therefore the "fixed costs" associated with running a camp), to the illegal - the rampant industry practices of wage theft. Check out our website for common forms of wage theft, and if you think your wages are being stolen - get in touch with us at treeworkersindustrialgroup.work

We're On The Move

Tree planters and silviculture workers are among the most exploited groups of workers in Canada.



The Industrial Wood and Allied Workers of Canada logo is visible in the bottom left corner of the image.

The majority have underpaid, migratory, and unstable jobs with short work years and few benefits. Many face unsafe work conditions and transient employment.

We're out to change that. The Industrial Wood and Allied Workers of Canada is organizing in all sectors of the forest industry to bring a better future for working Canadians.

We are also lobbying provincial governments for progressive forest and labour policies that will protect all workers.

IWA flyer from 23 years ago (Sources [hyperlinked online](#))

UNIONS & ADVOCACY GROUPS

(WARRIOR ROGUE: EQUIPMENT CHOICE)

In the face of the fundamental shifts in the makeup of the workforce, and in conjunction with the lumber mills, treeplanters have had representation on three separate occasions: Once through a union (the IWA), once more by an activist-based advocacy organization (CREWS), and currently by solidarity organizers (TWIG).





UNIONS

THE I.W.A.

(1987-2004)

The Industrial, Wood, and Allied Workers of Canada (IWA) splintered off from another union with the same initials in 1987, and acted as a silviculture workers union that ensured basic conditions, as well as increased piece-rate wages and benefits. It merged with the United Steelworkers in 2004, and ultimately tree planters lost representation as part of collective bargaining negotiations. The IWA represented the only unionization effort for treeplanterers in Canada.

ADVOCACY GROUPS

C.R.E.W.S.

(1999 - ~2015)

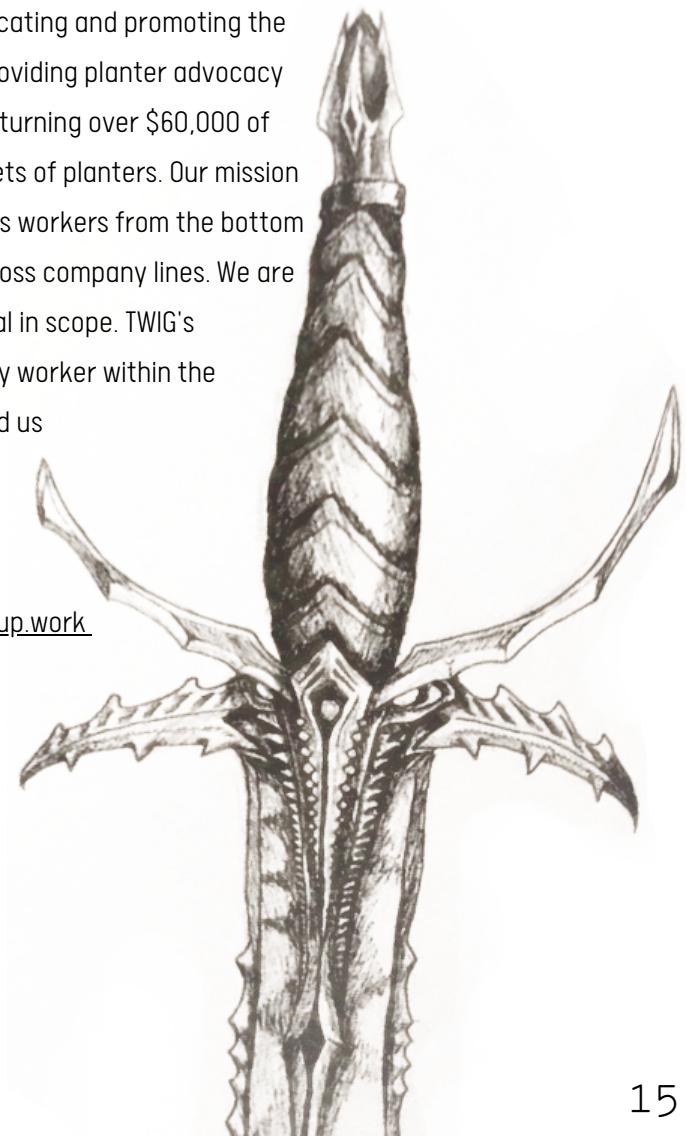
The Canadian Reforestation and Environmental Workers Society (CREWS) was an exclusively-BC based advocacy drive (formed from previous efforts in the province) that forged alliances between treeplanterers and community-based campaigns, in a more activist-oriented approach to traditional labor organizing. At its height, it boasted over 1000 members, and "successful protests over chemical brushing applications."

T.W.I.G.

(2018 - PRESENT)

Tree Worker's Industrial Group is a grassroots advocacy collective that is pushing for worker representation within tree planting. Since its founding in October 2018, we have been involved in collective action at multiple planting companies: advocating and promoting the legal rights of workers, providing planter advocacy on sexual violence, and returning over \$60,000 of stolen wages to the pockets of planters. Our mission is to support each other as workers from the bottom up and build solidarity across company lines. We are volunteer-run and national in scope. TWIG's membership is open to any worker within the industry, for more info find us on social media, or visit our website:

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WHAT DO WE DO?

(FROG: BOSS BATTLE)

So how do we organize our way out of an industry hellbent on keeping us, as workers and as citizens, unable to tangibly challenge colonial capitalism? When answering that question it's important to keep two things in mind.

The first is to know who we're up against (surprise, it's billionaires). **The silviculture industry, like most resource industries in Canada, is a powerful oligopoly**. Here's a story about a recent business venture as an example.

In the primary province of British Columbia, there are essentially 5 companies that run lumber in the province. They are West Fraser, Canfor, Tolko, Interfor, and Timberwest. Just three years ago in 2019, billionaire Jim Pattison (dubbed "[Canada's Warren Buffet](#)"), a major owner-investor in forestry, attempted to seize two of them - West Fraser and Canfor. **He planned to strong-arm his majority of shares (51%) in Canfor to secure full privatization of the company, and then use it to force the sale and subsequent purchase of West Fraser, where he owned around 12% shares.** Pattison's strategy with Canfor was to take advantage of the economic shocks suffered by the company, which suffered an [operating loss of \\$124 million](#) in the third quarter of that year (resulting in the closure of mills and disruption of livelihoods in rural BC) to force through a proposal to privatize. The company accepted the proposal. Sensing a deal, he increased his stock share in West Fraser, buying an additional 2% to bring his total shares to 14%. (Refer to figure 1.0).



Figure 1.0: This account of Pattison's business ventures, as well as the zine's content more generally, is based on TWIG research.

All underlined words in this zine correspond to hyperlinked sources that can be accessed through the online version.

We encourage you to check it out at treeworkersindustrialgroup.work

Keep in mind he had the narcissism to call his company "The Jim Pattison Group", and it's Canada's [second-largest private company at \\$10 billion in sales a year](#), and 48,000 employees. Because billionaires are seemingly omnipresent, you may recognize the name from such random things as either a vaguely evil car dealership, or the publisher of the Guinness Book of World Records.

But in this case, his plans failed. His chessboard was disrupted on both fronts. On the one hand by a [shareholder right's agreement](#) from West Fraser, and on the other by Canfor's [minority of shareholders rejecting the acquisition](#), with only 45% of voters in favor. Instead of being swallowed by Pattison, West Fraser itself purchased another company, Norbord, in 2019. [Pattison was quick to signal his support](#) while licking his wounds. Amidst these power plays from above, the newly-acquired Norbord [closed yet another mill](#), uprooting the livelihoods of 160 forestry workers in what is now a common story in interior BC.

Pattison's bid is an example that shows how for Canadian oligarchs, the transfer of power and ownership during times of crisis are merely moves in the game of capitalism that they carry out without much regard for the welfare of communities or workers. Their invariable expressed position is to adopt only the lens of prospective profit, and they dismiss everything else as meaningless politics. As we saw in the media surrounding Pattison's failed acquisition, billionaires are quick to assure people of their ambivalence whenever they make a failed move, and to compliment what they consider to be good moves, so long as the principle of profit is adhered to with sufficient orthodoxy.

When you have that much money, you're not acting as a relatable human being so much as an automaton of the market. And the capitalist "market" is, just to be clear, a recently invented concept. A cursory glance at the numbers behind climate change shows that this recently invented concept (that our current economic system is built over) is clashing with this thing we didn't recently invent called the atmosphere.

WARRIOR ROGUE FINAL THOUGHTS

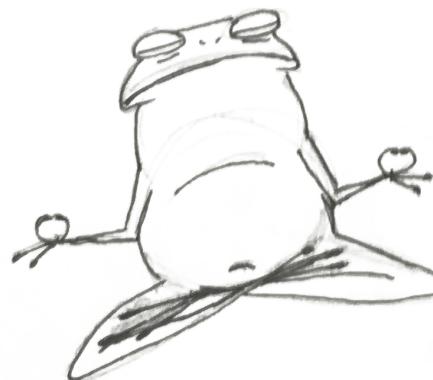
How effective has solidarity organizing been? Check us out yourself, at treeworkersindustrialgroup.work



HEAD OF WISDOM

FINAL THOUGHTS

Remember that business can be trusted to address society's issues, so long as they are given a free hand to operate.



FROG FINAL THOUGHTS

What the Head of Wisdom just said above is both demonstrably false and pedagogically classist. It is also the take-home message in business or economics textbooks.

Take a peek under the mask that capitalism has placed over universities (next page)

HEAD OF WISDOM TRUE FINAL THOUGHTS

Business without democracy is its own little dictatorship. Unless workers organize in opposition, there is every indication that industrial capitalists will incinerate the world and everyone on it before compromising their profits.



Coming back to the question of how to organize out of industrial capitalism, the second thing to keep in mind is that even when business leaders are basically cartoonish villains, **tree planters as a workforce are incredibly well positioned to be the leaders for change in the industry**. The history of our workforce is one where victories have been achieved, for the environment, for workers, and for the communities out of which we operate. So instead of accepting an industry that acts in lockstep with other resource based industries in Canada by creating boom and bust cycles in rural towns, ravaging their communities, destabilizing the environment, and furthering a history of systemic racism, all at the whim of multinational corporations and apathetic oligarchs, we organize. **We organize to empower workers, advocate for scientifically grounded environmental planning, address the legacy of colonial violence against indigenous peoples, and uplift rural communities.** Let's not underestimate ourselves - we are the voice of the industry, what do we want that voice to be saying?

At TWIG, our approach is built on solidarity, which we can describe simply as "two or more people working together to improve conditions in the workplace". We're not trying to create some bureaucratic overhead body, **it's the relationships we cultivate between each other as workers, and as people, that has and always will be the source of our power**, and we encourage you to join us in our mission to reinvent our relationship to our own labor.



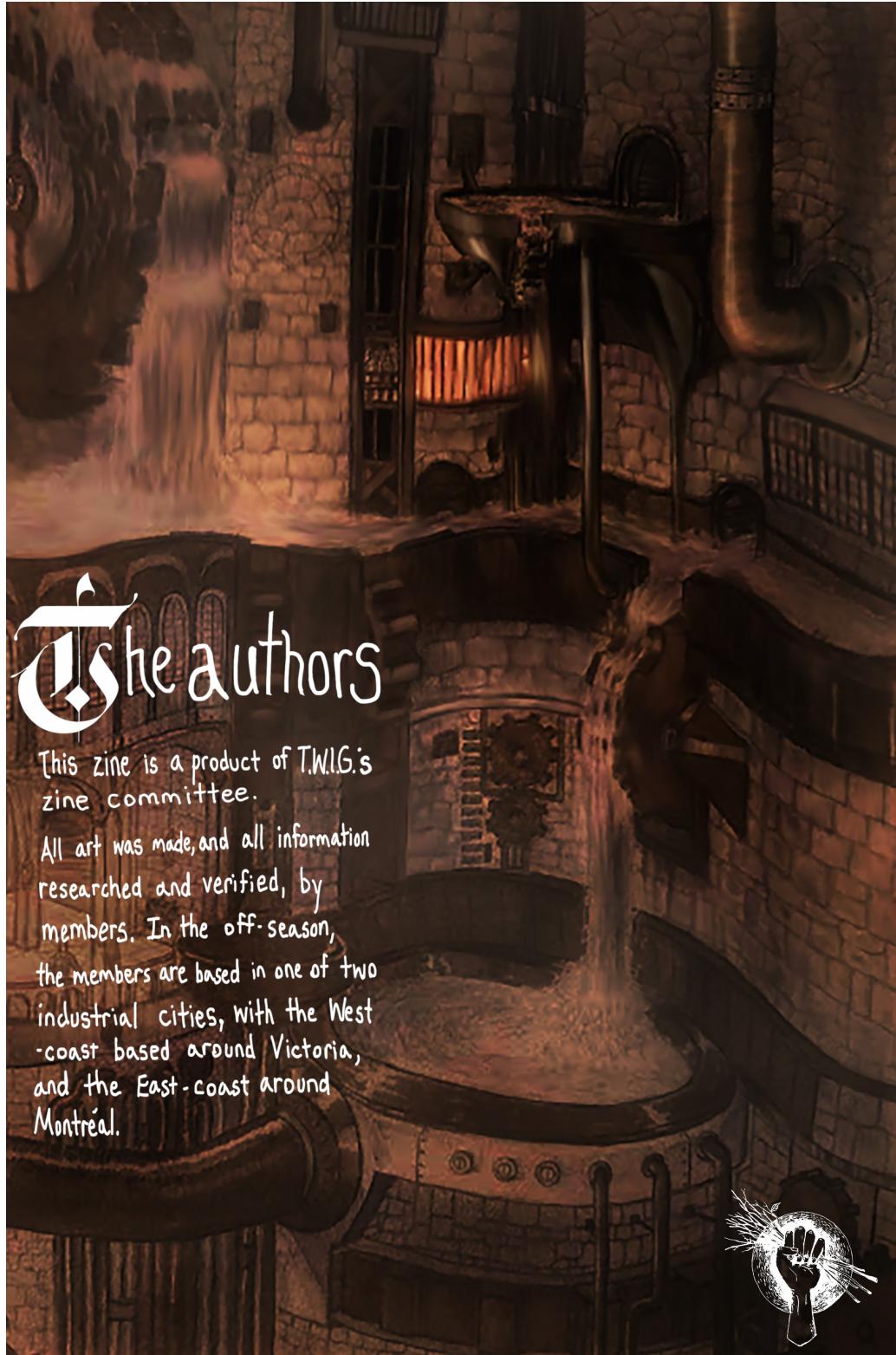
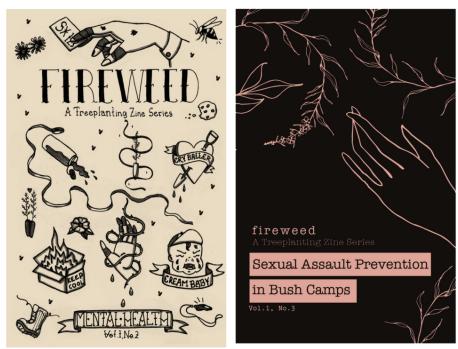
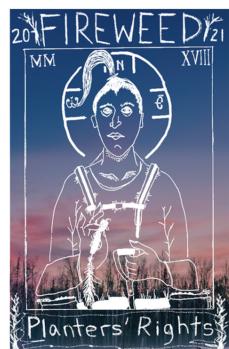


ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Check out some of the other zines of the series:

FIREWEED



The authors

This zine is a product of T.W.I.G.'s zine committee.

All art was made, and all information researched and verified, by members. In the off-season, the members are based in one of two industrial cities, with the West-coast based around Victoria, and the East-coast around Montréal.

