

Supporters to Demand “Drop the Charges - Focus on Rail Safety” at Court Hearing on Lac-Mégantic Tragedy

Committee will deliver thousands of petitions calling for the Canadian and Quebec authorities to drop the charges against railroad workers Tom Harding and Richard Labrie

For Immediate Release: Thursday, September 8, 2016

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Time: Tuesday, September 13, 2016 at 9:00 AM

Place: Palais de Justice, 375 Rue King Ouest (corner of King and Belvédère), Sherbrooke, QC

(Sherbrooke, QC)-Representatives of the *Harding and Labrie Defense Committee, Railroad Workers United (RWU)* and community allies from the Lac Mégantic area will be at the procedural hearings at the Palais de Justice in Sherbrooke, QC on September 13th, 2016 carrying petitions signed by over 2000 people across North America calling for ending the prosecution of Canadian railworkers Tom Harding and Richard Labrie. Harding and Labrie have been targeted and charged under the Criminal Code as well as the Railroad Safety Act and other laws. The charges could result in prison terms up to life.

“Investigations have already determined that the actions of these two were not the predominate cause the Lac-Mégantic tragedy,” said Committee representative Fritz Edler, a 35-year veteran train engineer. “The runaway train that killed 47 and destroyed half the town was the result of railroad managerial irresponsibility compounded by a failure of government oversight and safety regulation. There was a lax safety culture that has to change.”

The irresponsible practice of sending out unit trains of the most volatile kind with only a single crew member illustrates the disregard for public safety by the Montreal Maine and Atlantic Railroad (MMA) whose most important policymakers have had no legal penalty.

“The number of runaway trains reported across Canada has increased every year since LacMégantic,” Edler added. “It’s no wonder the people of Lac Mégantic have no confidence in the current actions of the railroad companies or the government agencies to keep them safe, and are calling for the tracks to detour around the town rather than run through it.”

Supporters will gather at 9 am on September 13th in the Palais de Justice Square in Sherbrooke to present the petitions. After the procedural hearing, Harding's legal defense team will update supporters on the latest developments in the case.

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The Harding and Labrie Defense Committee was formed in 2015 to organize defense for Canadian Rail Steelworkers Tom Harding and Richard Labrie; who have been scapegoated for the tragic Lac-Mégantic trainwreck in 2013. Facts developed since the wreck by investigators for the Government and independent journalists make clear that railroad policies were responsible for creating the culture of negligence that led to that disaster.

Railroad Workers United (RWU) is a North American cross-craft solidarity and advocacy organization of railworkers and their supporters. RWU members and supporters on railroads across North America are monitoring the Harding/Labrie case closely. RWU believes jailing Harding and Labrie will be an obstacle to current day safety culture on Canada's railways, as well as a roadblock to getting full accountability for the Mégantic wreck.

For more information, visit www.hardingdefense.org or follow us on Twitter @harding_labrie