

INSIDEOUT
OCTOBER 2020



EMPOWER ORGANIZE RESIST

INSIDEOUT is the monthly publication of the Edmonton Local of CUPW.

This newsletter aspires to educate and inform members and affiliates about our union's activities, opportunities, and challenges, as well as to raise awareness regarding all things labour.

Opinions expressed are those of the author and not necessarily the official views of the Local.

The InsideOut committee is always interested in submissions of original articles, photographs, or illustrations. Prospective material must always concern CUPW or the labour movement, but submissions of general interest to the membership will also be considered.

We will also publish Letters to the Editor should you feel an issue requires further discussion. All submissions are subject to editing for brevity, clarity, etc.

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT OCTOBER 2020

TEARING DOWN THE WALL

One of the biggest challenges faced by unions is the wall that is allowed to grow between the union's leadership and its members. Sometimes this is a result of gatekeeping; the deliberate process by which leaders hoard knowledge and opportunity to force others to rely on them. Most often the wall grows because nothing is done to provide alternatives to systems that reward the performance of individual specialists filing grievances, arguing arbitrations or holding consultations. As has been stated many times before, the very core of our union's power is directly proportional to how informed and active our members are in the functions of our union. The day every one of our members embraces the reality that we are all the union, is the day that we can all change every aspect of our relationship to our jobs.

Breaking down the wall is a necessary step on the path towards our collective empowerment. A time-tested way to do so is through radical transparency – both in honestly explaining the challenges we all face in improving our jobs and inviting members to share the responsibility to collectively fight for those improvements.

Bureaucratic Peak Season

Few things exemplify the wall more than consult season. Consults, by design, are practices enshrined by the rise of business unionism where hired representatives or union leadership perform damage control during annual

corporate attempts to exploit loopholes in the collective agreement. Consults also have the, perhaps intended, effect of completely preoccupying the resources of our local without giving us the meaningful power to resist CPC maneuvers. Over the next month, our office will be coordinating at least 10 consults ranging from barchart relief staffing reviews for the depots and transportation, to vacation boards, to annual shift bids.

Last year, our office continued the excellent work that Sister Dodsworth re-introduced while President, to widely include workforce participation in consults – a horizontal model instead of vertical where workers can witness firsthand how farcical the consult process can be. First, we reach out to our trusted stewards, and then fill the gaps with members we know to be informed and committed to the interests of the union. We may be stuck with the consult model for now, but that's not stopping us from finding ways to be more inclusive and transparent about it. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those who'll helping us weather this dispiriting storm and make sure members hear the truth about the tricks CPC will try to pull.

No New Hires Left Behind

Although the pandemic has temporarily deterred the ability of our office to be present on all our workfloors in the same way, it has given us an opportunity to focus on

other areas that need improvement. For too long, our newest members have been left twisting in the wind, completely at the mercy of CPCs broken training process, resulting in almost 70% quitting within a year. The CUPW part of the process has Urban new hires needing to come to our union office to sign up for union membership and receive an (outdated) package on their rights.

Building from excellent foundations established by Todd Vipond and other activists at EDDD, our Exec has revamped and updated the rights package given to all Urban new hires, and developed an intake process that offers a more robust orientation of our union, and invites the member to immediately start receiving our local listserv dispatch as well as be added to a member-directed text group to receive speedy updates and info. Once we've collected 10 or so new hires from the EMPP, a text group will be set up for them as well.

For reasons unknown, RCMC new hires are not directed to the union office in the same way, nor do they have an orientation package. I've since secured commitments from CPC that all Edmonton RSMC new hires will be required to report to our office to sign up for union membership as a condition of employment. Once here, they will receive their very own orientation package and given the same opportunities to stay connected to our union via the listserv and text group. I'm still exploring options for

connecting with our affiliate new hires who will not be able to make the long trip into Edmonton.

As evidenced by the excellent work of the EDDD crew, these small gestures to welcome a member into our union family go a long way in helping them navigate just how difficult the early days at CPC are, and prime them for what solidarity is all about – workers directly supporting workers, and openly exploring their collective power. We should all be doing our best to provide a sense of stability and community to our newest members, so that they will be more likely to survive the rookie grind and experience first-hand the benefits of integrating with our union.

A Steward For Every 20 Members

Our Education committee has been hard at work processing the applications for the basic steward courses which will run over the next two weeks. We had more applications than spots were available which illustrates that, despite pandemic fatigue, many of our members are still looking for ways to get more involved with our union. There is no such thing as too many stewards, so as long as there is still interest we will keep running the courses. We currently have one steward for every ~30 members; our next goal is to have one for every 20, with multiple representatives for both Urban and RSMCs on every shift, in every facility (where applicable). Last year we recruited 20 new stewards; the

hope is that we'll have 20 more this year, in addition to further strengthening the active ones we already have.

The application deadline for the Advanced Steward course is Oct 15. Where the basic course is giving new stewards the skills to support members, the advanced course is about empowering an already active steward to embrace more a leading role in the union to be able to better collaborate with other stewards and activists to move our local from a reactive to proactive stance – effectively fighting for improvements instead of just putting out fires. Depending on how successful these courses are with smaller class sizes, we'll be able to plan our next rounds of training once peak season is over come February.

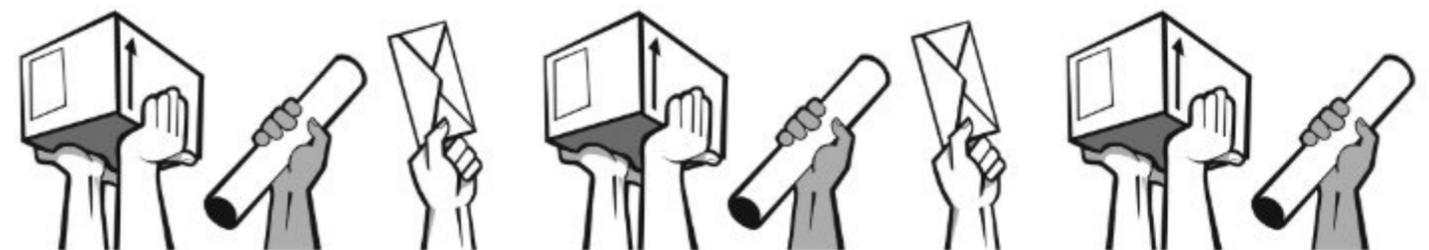
The Defiance Mobilization Programme

After asking, and waiting, for over a year for our National Executive to start any kind of meaningful membership preparation for our next round of negotiations just two years away, it has become clear that we will have to continue pushing this process from the local level ourselves. Our general strategy of dedicated internal organizing using the Taking Back Our Workfloor course was sidelined at the start of pandemic but opportunities are resurfacing. Winnipeg officially passed a motion to run the course. Logistics are being finalized but I will be

driving there the first week of November, at their local's expense, to help train facilitators to run the course and then help them co-facilitate the course for attendees. From there we will circle back to Lethbridge and Calgary to see if we can reschedule with them.

This deliberate process of empowering members at the local level will be the foundation for our union building the capacity and cross-local alliances needed to actually have the power to effectively fight back against CPC and the government. Later in this meeting I will be sharing a motion to endorse the "Defiance Mobilization Programme"; a position paper recommending specific actions and calling for support from locals all across Canada to organize alongside us so that we don't keep repeating the failures of 2011 and 2018 over and over again. Our collective power is the only leverage we have, but we will never realize that power unless we are willing to be honest about the stakes, and what we are all collectively willing to do to improve our lives. The walls fragmenting our membership are just as fragile as the unjust laws disbanding our pickets – if we can all pledge to stand together, the mountains before us will erode into dust. 

By Roland Schmidt, Local President



DEFIANCE MOBILIZATION PROGRAMME (DMP)

In less than two years, our union will once again be going into negotiations. If our last round has taught us anything, it's that despite having a constitutional right to collectively bargain, and the supreme court striking down back-to-work legislation enacted against us, the government and Canada Post will use any method available to them, legal or not, to disadvantage us. If we remain in this passive, reactive stance, our demands to meaningfully improve our working conditions, and expand the postal service, will once again be silenced by back-to-work legislation and the inherently hostile arbitration process.

The action plan unanimously approved at our last national union convention was clear in that we should prepare our members against future back-to-work legislation. Section C-3 of our National Constitution is clearer still that our union should make "every effort to oppose any repressive labour legislation" and commit to "building membership awareness and confidence in resisting regressive legislation." To win this inevitable battle, we must start preparing now by giving ourselves the tools to effectively fight Canada Post directly from our own workfloors. Deliberately building our organizing capacity through already established, successful training models, is the only way to adequately prepare ourselves for the struggle ahead. The DMP is a proposal to nurture the solidarity necessary to finally confront the forces aligned against not only us, but all Canadian workers. An injury to one is an injury to all.

By endorsing the Defiance Mobilization Programme our local pledges the following:

1. That a notice of motion be made, at the next possible opportunity, for our local to reallocate 7% of their total budget exclusively for the recruiting for, and the running of, the Taking Back Our Workfloor course developed by the CUPW Prairie Region that gives members the training to effectively organize their own workfloors and use direct action to confront management. Specifics of where and how the budget should be reallocated should be detailed in the motion.
2. That the local acclaim no fewer than one, and as many as are interested, delegates to serve on a DMP working group. The purpose of this group is to coordinate with DMP delegates from other locals to further promote the DMP and give their local Education committee recommendations on how to best implement the Taking Back Our Workfloor course. This delegate role is not an official CUPW position. Acclamations for this position(s) should be held immediately following the successful adoption of the DMP endorsement. Delegate contact information should then be emailed to: union@cupwedm.net
3. That the local send a formal recommendation to the National Executive Committee (NEC) to do the following
 - a. Endorse the DMP in its entirety, and actively encourage all locals to present and debate the motion to endorse at their own general membership meetings.
 - b. Include the presentation of a defiance referendum alongside presentations to ratify negotiation demands (National Constitution section 4.02). The pro-defiance presentation will be done by an advocate of the DMP. In a local where no DMP advocate is available, the NEC will arrange a DMP advocate being brought from the nearest local. The question posed after the presentation, and voted on via secret ballot, scrutinized by a DMP advocate, will be: "Are you willing to defy back-to-work legislation if such an action has at least 2/3 support of this National CUPW vote and the backing of the labour movement?"
 - c. As dictated by our National Constitution (section 4.25), that a failure to adopt either of these recommendations be given a full report explaining to the recommending local why the NEC is rejecting opportunities to prepare our membership to fight back-to-work legislation.



WORKERS HELPING WORKERS

CUPW HELPS WITH SUCCESSFUL FOOD DRIVE

On Saturday, September 26th, our Health and Safety Officer Rashpal Sehmy held a food drive at the Meadows Recreation Centre to support workers struggling during the pandemic. With thanks to all those who donated, the drive gathered 169 kg of food and \$1525.00 in online donations through the Workers Helping Workers initiative on the Canada Helps website. Donations can still be made to the fundraiser until October 15th.

We spoke with Rashpal about what inspired him to organize the event, community care, and community involvement.

InsideOut (IO): What inspired you to organize this Workers Helping Workers Food-drive?

Rashpal Sehmy (RS): This year due to COVID-19, we were unable to hold the Labour Day BBQ we usually hold with the help of the Edmonton and District Labour Council in Giovanni Caboto Park.

IO: Have you seen any direct effects of our current government and COVID-19 in your community?

RS: It's a little bit more dire now because even though some people have qualified for CERB, there are others who don't qualify. So, for example, people who might be temporary foreign workers, or people working under the table.

IO: Do you foresee a time that we won't need initiatives like Workers Helping Workers?

RS: We have to understand that no matter what we make in our lives – whether it's in our jobs or in our communities – there is always someone else that has less than us. I don't ever see the problem going away. When there's more need for community groups, unions, and non-profit organizations to help, it shows me that the governments have failed from a provincial, federal, and municipal level in taking care of a situation or problem that exists.

IO: Do you think there's a chance people's minds are changing in the past while with certain Bills being passed and with COVID – like maybe those who voted UCP are reconsidering?

RS: I think so, especially when you look at the schools. What I'm getting back is that the government had the Summer months to come up with a proper and clear plan and that plan is not working properly. People are testing positive [for COVID-19] on the school buses or in the schools themselves and that has created more havoc for parents who were thinking "my kids will be back at school and I can go back to work and I don't need to worry about daycare or anything like that." But now parents are scrambling to figure out what to do if their kids can't be in school.

IO: Do you think this will result in a situation where more people will get involved on an activist level?

RS: I honestly think that activism itself is bred out of the need to help other people. You're going to have people who are always there to help. There are going to be worms that come out of the woodwork, but at the same time there's going to be that light sheen that comes out of the woodwork when you sand it – you get beautiful people.

IO: From an organizing standpoint, how was the process of setting up the food drive and getting people to participate?

RS: I think people know there is a need. Could it have been better? I think it could have been. But at the same time, it shows us that everybody is busy doing something. Whether we're busy with work, homelife, taking care of the kids, shopping – not everybody has time. But one of the things it showed me was that in reaching out to the City for access to the recreation centre and reaching out to the Edmonton Food Bank, they are now more than willing to continue to work with us on ongoing and future projects. You know, like the first time you decide to paint your house? You start in one room and you're hesitant, then you get to the second room and you're like, "Hey! I can do this!" and before you know it, you're done and in the living room and it looks awesome!



IT'S GOING TO TAKE MORE THAN THE COURTS TO STOP KENNEY'S BILL 32

By Cole Rockarts rankandfile.ca

On Wednesday, July 29, Alberta's United Conservative Party government passed the Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act, which aims to control how union dues can finance political activities and legislate restrictions on where unions can picket. The bill claims it will save employers \$100 million dollars per year by "reducing red tape", and enhancing worker "choice" and "promote fairness and productivity".

Since the government was elected in 2019, Premier Jason Kenney has steadily chipped away at the rights of working people and labour unions, slashing the minimum wage, cutting health and safety standards and laying off tens of thousands of workers across a variety of sectors. Now, the government has declared a war on workers.

The Bill has several damaging implications for workers, and allows for the government to be able to direct the Labour Relations Board to suspend dues checkoff for up to six

months during an illegal strike. Additionally, Alberta would be the first province to have union members have to opt-in to having some of their dues go to political activities. Bill 32 will also bring in changes to the Employment Standards Act and Labour Relations Code. Labour and Immigration Minister Jason Copping stated that the Bill will "help businesses save time and money, letting them focus on getting Albertans back to work while protecting workers".

BRIEF CONTEXT

In 2018, the NDP made changes to the Labour Relations Code, legislation that had been unchanged for 30 years. The amendments brought forward improvements to union certification, first-contract legislation, and shifted the burden of proof from workers to employers regarding unfair labour practices.

Bill 32 puts restrictions on guaranteed mandatory first contract arbitration, certification and remedial certifications. With the passing of this legislation, it makes the process for

union certification longer, extending it to resolution within six months. As many organizers know, this gives employers extra time to commit unfair labour practices and undermines the fundamental right to organize in Alberta. Similarly, it makes remedial certification harder to access for workers who experience unfair labour practices (such as firings and interference in organizing drives) at the hands of bosses.

In 2008, CLAC worked with employers to ensure that open periods that allow workers to change unions were closed. A year later in Firestone [2009] Alta. L.R.B.R. 134, the Alberta Labour Relations Board ruled that this violated the rights of workers to choose their representation. CLAC has continued the government to change the Labour Relations Code and overturn the Firestone decision. While the Firestone decision ended 30 years of abusive practice, there were no negative consequences to employers that engaged in union busting drives for those wanting to decertify from CLAC and switch to a real union. Bill 32 amends the Code to allow for the

closure of an open period by renewing collective agreements early, and prevents workers from voting to change unions, which can only happen during a specified period.

LABOUR RIGHTS UNDER ATTACK

Bill 32 directly attacks unions' abilities to support political campaigns and causes, from donating to charities to running campaigns for the minimum wage and public health care. Along with the changes to unions, the bill also makes several changes for non unionized workers, including changing the rules for payroll, termination and holiday pay. It also expands the jobs that 13 and 14 year olds can do without requiring a permit, as well as pay them the two-tiered youth minimum wage rollback that the UCP passed in June.

One of the most concerning aspects of the bill is that workers are now forced to opt-in to pay the portion of union dues that go towards funding political action. Bill 23 has made Alberta the only province in Canada to restrict the ability of unions to raise public awareness and campaign on issues that affect the lives of all workers, from health care and child care campaigns to the fight for a higher minimum wage.

The opt-in clause now requires workers in a bargaining unit must elect or opt-in before dues are collected or used for political activities. It divides dues into two categories: Category A, which covers things such as funding social causes and issues, donating to charities or NGOs, organizations or groups affiliated with or supportive of a political party (such as labour councils and the Alberta Federation of Labour), and 'any other activities prescribed by the regulations'. Category B covers activities under the Labour Relations Code, collective bargaining, activities that relate to representation of

members and activities that do not fall within other categories.

The form and timing of opt-in dues processes will also be determined by regulations. There will likely be an attempt by the provincial government to try and have unions put more expenses in category A, and there is expected to be ongoing legal disputes about allocations.

The omnibus bill also puts limitations on pickets and secondary pickets. The bill attacks workers' freedom of expression and assembly by legislating restrictions on where unions are allowed to picket and forcing them to apply to the Alberta Labour Relations Board for permission to picket. Further, picketing is 'deemed wrongful' when it obstructs or impedes a person from crossing a picket line which fundamentally contradicts the efficacy of strikes, and undermines the right to strike and workplace organizing as a whole.

FIGHTING BACK

26 unions and the Alberta Federation of Labour are signing onto a legal challenge on the grounds that the bill is unconstitutional and interferes with union members' right to association and freedom of expression.

This is not just about Bill 32, but about broadly limiting the right to all forms of dissent and protest. After the passage of Bill 1, which imposes harsh penalties for protestors shutting down or blocking critical infrastructure, including pipelines and railways. Bill 1 has also been met with a constitutional challenge from organized labour.

But a legal challenge alone will not stop the legislation before it wreaks havoc on labour organizations and limits the power of union and non-union members to organize in their workplaces. The impact of Bill 32 won't

be fully understandable until regulations are made, which is expected in September.

IMMENSE OPPORTUNITY

Over the past several months, Alberta workers have seen hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to post-secondary education, steps taken towards the privatization of health care through Bill 30 and tens of thousands of layoffs to a range of sectors. Bill 32 is an existential threat to unions throughout the province, and simultaneously offers unions in Alberta the opportunity to organize in ways they never have before.

Employers are taking advantage of the austerity that the provincial government is imposing on workers across Alberta. Conservative governments and their austerity wish lists will not stop at the cuts, attacks on collective bargaining, and working towards destroying the public sector unless there is an organized resistance from workers.

What workers and unions can do now is organize. The only thing that the UCP and it's corporate allies will be threatened by is their bottom line. Thus, the only effective mobilization that the government will listen to is a growing number of work stoppages and successful (all out) strikes across the province. Any union that expects to survive the Kenney administration has to invest its energy, labour, and money into strike funds and doing the time consuming work of educating members in the power of taking their workplaces into their own hands. After Janus in the U.S., thousands of workers began to mobilize their membership and set off a series of strike waves in education, healthcare, and beyond. Alberta has been here before – the only question now is if we are going to be doomed to repeat history, or take action.

NO BOSS IS YOUR FRIEND

DAVID, A FORMER PIZZA PARLOR WORKER RELATES THIS STORY OF EXTREME UNION-BUSTING BY AN ALLEGEDLY PRO-UNION BOSS

By David Sqr1

September 7/[organizing.work](#)

I was hired on at Scottie's Pizza Parlor in mid-2018. I had just transitioned out of a low-wage job in a grocery store deli where I had been involved in an organizing effort for almost two years. I was burnt out after trying with my coworkers to rescue the campaign from a bungled operation on the part of UFCW 555 and thorough union-busting on the part of the company, New Seasons Market.

At the time, Scottie's seemed like the opposite of where I had been working: a small shop with just one location, a significantly higher wage, especially once pooled tips were factored in, predictable scheduling and paid time off (rarities in the service industry), and the little things that seemed nice, too, like reimbursement for solid work shoes, free staff meals and a shift drink, in addition to being able to play whatever music we wanted to.

On top of that, I'd included my organizing experience in my resume, and discussed with Scottie, in my interview, how much I was looking forward to being treated like an actual human being at work. Scottie's had signs in the window of support for the Burgerville Workers Union and, eventually, the Little Big Union. Scottie himself explicitly said that he supported unions and one day that summer, on a staff trip to the river, he told me excitedly how much he would love to see a pizzaiolo union in Portland. As far as bosses go, he seemed like a good guy and I was glad to be able to talk about working conditions and unions with him.



When I started, there were about seven other people working there (over time, that grew to twelve). Positions were divided into three main categories, with some flexibility between them: cashier/dishwasher, pizza maker, and ovens/expo. The latter two were reserved for those who had been there longer and knew what they were doing. I washed dishes and swiped credit cards and mostly just lis-

tened to get a sense of the workplace culture.

The first things I noticed were that Scottie was hardly ever around and that folks were a lot less content than I imagined they'd be. While they loved making pizza and essentially having free rein of the shop, there was a significant amount of tension around their relationship with Scottie. The gist

of it was the feeling that he had abandoned the shop and left the workers to pick up the slack while he collected a salary; at the same time, he would periodically do things that had an alienating impact on just about everyone. He would schedule large orders in the middle of the dinner rush, or invite a pizza tour into the parlor and neglect to acknowledge the contribution of the workers standing right behind him. People seemed to both like Scottie as a person and feel frustrated with the way he acted as a boss. They both wanted him to be there, supporting the shop, and resented him when he was there, messing with the efficient routine they'd established.

Unionizing

Over time, talk of unionizing ebbed and flowed. Sales continuously grew and the shop added workers. Communication grew increasingly inconsistent. Eventually, Scottie accepted the reality that he was not managing the space and hired a manager from outside the shop, who did her best to support us in the ways Scottie was neither able nor willing to do. There was a precarious balance, which finally shifted when Scottie decided to remodel the space in mid-2019, dramatically altering the workflow and speeding everything up. Though he made a show of trying to include worker input, the final decision was ultimately his.

The new routine was awkward and challenging to adapt to, which heightened the stress and tension in the shop. Suddenly my coworkers wanted to meet outside of work to talk about how terrible the change was. We communicated through the web of relationships that had grown organically in the shop and met several times to determine what was important to us and to decide whether or not we should formally unionize. The union was rooted in the community we had

made together, supporting one another.

We decided to go the IWW route, declaring our union to Scottie in the late summer, in a petition lovingly calligraphed by a coworker, signed by the entire shop. A group of workers "surprised" Scottie one morning with the petition, flowers, and champagne, toasting the event that Scottie had always said he desired.

Our intention was to use our collective voice to have greater input in the decisions that were being made. We shared a desire to collectively manage the place we were essentially already collectively managing through workplace conditioning. We wanted more control over what was happening to us via executive decision-making that didn't take into account what we were doing and dealing with. Most of my coworkers trusted Scottie to engage with us in good faith, taking him at his word. Many of us, myself included, wanted to believe the public-facing messaging of the shop: that this was a pro-worker space, where people's lives and livelihoods were given serious care and consideration. We hoped that this would reverse the bizarre (but probably commonplace) dynamic of an absent boss making decisions that had no effect on him. We were starting to talk about what bargaining might look like when COVID hit.

The pandemic was a crisis that loomed swiftly on the horizon and then descended on Portland. Nobody knew exactly how to respond in the beginning, and Scottie's was no exception. We started talking about it on the shop floor maybe two weeks before shelter-in-place began. "Anybody worried about coronavirus?" "Are we going to be safe?" "What should we do?" As it became clear that it was a real threat, we began to worry about maintaining a safe and hygienic work

environment, and about contact with customers. We expressed some of our concerns via the restaurant's internal communication system. All we were told was to wash our hands after doing anything (nearly impossible under normal restaurant circumstances, and definitely impossible with our new workflow). We were looking for a conversation, and did not receive much in return. We were forced to take matters into our own hands.

The biggest action the union ever took was on a Monday morning in mid-March, before the shelter-in-place order became our reality. After a week of internal union communication around our concerns and an utter lack of communication from Scottie around worker and community safety (we and our then-manager were unable to reach him for several days), we decided to close the parlor for the day to disinfect and formulate a safety strategy. Scottie was informed of this, and swiftly showed up to make sure we opened. Workers confronted him and he acquiesced to our demand that the parlor cease serving slices immediately, and move to only doing take-out pizza. Later, after a staff meeting, Scottie confronted a union worker, frustrated at how much money the temporary closure had cost him. The worker's response: "When did this become profits over people?"

We demanded a meeting with Scottie to discuss our options, and he agreed. We came with proposals for how to adapt to the new circumstances based on the input of all the workers. We wanted to figure out a way to keep working, to make sure that everyone was getting the hours they needed to pay their bills and keep their health-care. We entered this conversation in the good faith assumption that Scottie would try to work out a new system

(continued on next page)

NO BOSS IS YOUR FRIEND

(continued from page 11)

with us. We believed that he had our best interest in mind.

The day after the meeting, he informed us that, sadly, he had decided to lay us all off temporarily. We accepted, believing that we would help the business survive, with the expectation that we would be rehired in the future.

Three months later, after virtually no communication, we received a collective email stating that he had decided to move forward without us, and that our layoffs were to be permanent.

Reflections

It is tempting for us, as human beings, to believe that we can have a good relationship with a progressive employer. Scottie as a human being is decent and well-intentioned. I believe that this version of Scottie does support unions. His partner is involved in the labor movement and is even an IWW member. We continuously gave him the benefit of the doubt where having a job was concerned. But this perspective neglects to attend to the intrinsic power interests of bosses.

We felt personally betrayed by Scottie. Yet the actions he took in this situation were, at their root, deeply impersonal. A boss is structurally required by the logic of capitalism to act in their

own self-interest. In relationship to us (those who are compelled to sell our labor in order to pay rent) he is the one not only with the immense power to decide whether or not we have jobs tomorrow, but with the vested interest in a business that is legally his property, compelling him to act for himself, to consider himself first. In other words, Scottie the boss is unable to keep the promises made by Scottie the human being. Scottie the human being could (and did!) have feelings about his own actions; Scottie the boss is empowered to do whatever he wants. And when shit hits the fan, a boss is a boss.

The fact of the matter is that Scottie, falling in line with innumerable bosses, used the Covid crisis as a cover to lay off the entirety of his unionized workforce. To tell any other kind of story is disingenuous. According to his communication with us, the decision to lay us all off permanently was an intentional, premeditated decision — he had already been thinking about it before the pandemic hit.

After his public announcement regarding the layoffs — which we disputed in our own public statement — much of the community that myself and my coworkers had served for years came out, not in support of us who had just lost our jobs, but Scottie and his decision! People publicly expressed sympathy for how hard it must have been to make the decision, rather than outrage at the way we were disposed of. We aren't the only workers to have

ever experienced the bizarre way in which restaurants are treated as people with the capacity for suffering while workers are ignored or dehumanized, but it still stung.

In the end, the workers who oversaw the growth of the business became collateral. We were tossed aside like an old pizza oven that has outlived its usefulness. We were expendable to Scottie not because Scottie is evil, but because capitalist logic renders us expendable in his eyes. In retrospect, his actions were predictable. Bosses will always use the murkiness of human relationships to their own advantage, whether they know they are doing it or not. That's the way power works. And when we forget about power, we get burned.

We lost our jobs, that's true, but what we learned, as coworkers and as allies pushing together for what is right and just, will accompany us to every future job, more resilient and better prepared for whatever bosses throw at us. The true joy of organizing is not that we win recognition or a better contract (although those things are wonderful in their own right), but that we are actively involved in cultivating relationships of mutuality, dignity, and respect that are the foundation of building a new world in the shell of the old. The strength of these relationships is what empowers us to assert our own collective vision about what our workplaces should look like.



SUPPORTING TEMPS FACING HARASSMENT

(reprinted from the website)

A message from our 3rd Vice-President responsible for union activity in the depots, Kristine Bowman:

If you are experiencing, or witnessing, ANY bullying/harassment (from coworkers, management, or the public) please seek out a shop steward or contact our local office. Temps are covered in the collective agreement by articles 9 (right to complain and grievances), 33 (health and safety), and 56 (harassment/bullying). Filing formal complaints and grievances is a slow process, but has eliminated "problem" management in the past. If CPC attempted to further bully/harass once a formal complaint is filed, there would be serious repercussions.

If there's a group of you experiencing bullying at the hand of the same boss, ask around for the depot activists and plan with them to confront the bully as a group, and demand the behaviour change. Of course, this should always be paired with a paper trail. If you haven't cleared your 480 probation hours, contact the union office before deciding on any action.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to myself, another shop steward, our office, or a social steward, for guidance (or even to just vent).

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AMERICA'S BIGGEST WILDCAT STRIKE GAVE POSTAL WORKERS THE POWER

WILDCAT STRIKES HAVE LONG BEEN AN IMPORTANT MEANS FOR BLACK WORKERS TO BE HEARD. IN 1970, POSTAL WORKERS LAUNCHED THE BIGGEST ONE OF ALL.

Aaron Gordon, *Motherboard*
September 3, 2020

Last week, NBA players starting with the Milwaukee Bucks went on a wildcat strike to protest the shooting of Jacob Blake by police officer Rusten Sheskey in Kenosha, Wisconsin. The wildcat strike—which means it was not called by union officials—quickly spread across sports to other leagues and even studio commentators. It has already gone down as one of the most high-profile wildcat strikes of the century.

Although they're relatively rare nowadays, wildcat strikes are nothing new in American history, and they have been an especially powerful means of fighting for racial justice. To pick just a few examples, in 1968, Chicago school teachers engaged in a series of wildcat strikes fighting, among other things, school segregation and racism in teacher promotion practices. That same year, 1,300 Black sanitation workers in Memphis struck to protest "a long pattern of neglect and abuse of its black employees," instigated when two Black workers were killed by a malfunctioning truck. On April 3, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to the striking Memphis sanitation workers about the inextricable link between economic inequality and social justice, urging the workers, "We've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end." He was assassinated the following night.

But the biggest wildcat strike, not just during that period of unrest but in all of American history, took place in March of 1970 when more than 200,000 postal workers decided they had enough.

The wildcat strike crippled mail service across the country for eight days, at a time when the entire country relied on the mail to function. As elected officials scrambled to respond, the strike demonstrated who really holds and exercises power. It occurred just as Congress was debating the future of the post office, a future that, before the strike, postal workers technically didn't have a say. Through the strike, they got one. But most of all, the strike was about dignity in the workplace, primarily through earning a fair wage. And Black postal workers played a key role in the strike, because for them this was nothing new. They had long been fighting for dignity and fair wages at the post office.

To be clear, the 1970 postal worker strike was not primarily about racial justice issues. But they lurked just below the surface. As historian Philip Rubio wrote in his book about the strike and its aftermath, "Black postal workers, having led the long fight for equality in the post office and its unions, would play a key role in the 1970 strike."

Like so many other aspects of the Black experience in America, the story of Black labor in the post office is not a direct line of progress over the years. Increased employment during Reconstruction gave way to discriminatory hiring practices as white southerners regained power. It culminated with the Woodrow Wilson

administration that, among other things, required civil service applicants to include photos, ostensibly to prevent "impersonation" but practically to facilitate discrimination. The "rule of three" allowed hiring managers to pick among the three highest-scoring applicants on the civil service test, further facilitating blatantly racist hiring practices.

Nevertheless, employment with the post office was considered a good government job through the 1960s, especially for Black Americans who had few avenues for stable employment in the private sector. By 1940, 14 percent of all Black Americans earning above the national median worked for the postal service, according to economists Leah Platt Boustan and Robert A. Margo, and the average earnings of a Black postal worker put him (they were at the time essentially all men) in the top five percent of Black American earners and the 70th percentile of non-black workers. In other words, working at the post office was the best, most reliable, and most accessible ticket to the middle class Black Americans had through World War II, and for a good period afterwards too.

Starting in the 1960s, employment at the post office ceased to be an automatic ticket to the middle class because wages didn't keep up with inflation. In 1970, the starting salary for a postal worker was \$6,176, or \$42,333 adjusted for inflation. And it would take 21 years of service to get to the top pay of \$8,400 (\$57,578 today) for a letter carrier. Particularly in America's largest cities, this was not enough to support a family.

The post office was then a department of the federal government, so raises and benefits required a literal act of Congress. The massive expenditure of the Vietnam War made Congress less interested in giving federal employees, including postal workers, much-needed raises because they were having enough trouble financing the war as it was. In New York, which would become the epicenter of the strike, a union official estimated 20 percent of postal workers had multiple jobs to make ends meet, and 10 percent of his colleagues were on food stamps and welfare.

This burden fell heaviest on Black employees who hit the proverbial glass ceiling. In 1966, 91,000 out of 92,265 Black employees of the post office (98.6 percent) made up the lowest pay grades, according to Rubio's other book on the post office specifically about Black employment titled *There's Always Work at the Post Office*. The pay for those four lowest grades was

\$4,000 to \$6,000, or \$32,500 to \$48,800 in 2020 dollars.

The racial dynamics within the sprawling post office at the time was, in a word, complicated. It varied by office and region, and within the unions themselves there was decades of tension resulting from white supremacist efforts to maintain segregated unions and overpower the more radical Black unions that played active roles fighting for racial equality in society as well as workplace issues. But the one thing virtually all postal workers could agree on was their pay sucked.

One of the reasons their pay sucked was because Richard Nixon was holding up raises as a bargaining chip to corporatize the post office, a proposal floated by the Kappel Commission under President Johnson in 1968, named after its chair Frederick Kappel who made his fortune as the former head of AT&T

(shockingly, the former head of one of America's biggest corporations was all-in on privatizing the USPS). Then as now, proponents of corporatization cited the post office's unsustainable debt, inefficiencies, large workforce, and future liabilities as evidence the arrangement was unsustainable and further privatization would benefit everyone. Unlike today, they made these arguments even as mail volume soared.

Postal workers didn't see it that way. Nor did they see the 5.4 percent raise National Association of Letter Carriers union president James Rademacher agreed to in a secret meeting with Nixon in December 1969, in exchange for corporatizing the post office, as a good deal. In fact, they were outraged and had good reason to be, since the raise was less than the rate of inflation that year.

When the bill enshrining this deal, widely perceived by workers as

(continued on next page)



AMERICA'S BIGGEST WILDCAT STRIKE

(continued from page 15)

treachery on Rademacher's part, was voted out of the House committee, NALC Branch 36 in Manhattan called for a strike vote against the advice of its local president (and, obviously, national union leadership). On St. Patrick's Day 1970, the branch voted to go on strike, effectively halting mail delivery in Manhattan because it included workers from the massive James Farley Post Office complex in midtown that sorted much of the city's mail. Virtually all postal workers in the city followed. In total, some 200,000 postal employees—about one quarter of all workers—in 671 post offices around the country struck, including: Albany, Buffalo, Boston, Worcester, Providence, Newark, Jersey City, Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Toledo, Akron, Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Denver, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

It is essentially impossible to overstate the risk these strikers took. It was and remains illegal for federal employees to strike. They could have been fired and imprisoned. Some, like Nixon and NALC president Rademacher, blamed the strike on "outside agitators" from the Students for a Democratic Society, even though that was an utter falsehood. But that suspicion resulted in protesters getting surveilled by the NYPD, footage of which can be viewed in the New York City Department of Records website. When they voted to not go to work, the postal workers were jeopardizing everything. But they were largely a group of workers accustomed to jeopardizing everything. About three-quarters of postal workers were veterans. All postal workers had been required to sign an oath that they would never strike, but as Rubio put it,

"now many felt that the government had violated its social contract by not paying them enough to support their families."

Nixon, never a big fan of unions, initially wanted to act tough and fire every striking worker, according to Rubio, but his aides talked him out of it. The American public largely sympathized with the strikers, with polls later showing some 60 percent favorability for the strike even though the American media largely condemned it. Many people learned for the first time just how terrible postal pay was, that their friendly local mailman drove a cab at nights to make ends meet.

The public's widespread support for the strike is even more surprising in

“..most of all, the strike was about dignity in the workplace..and Black postal workers played a key role in the strike, because for them this was nothing new.”

retrospect considering the strike virtually shut down American business, somewhat like if the internet became too unstable to function today. Tax season was ramping up, with returns due in just a few weeks. Social security checks, bank statements, utility bills and payments, all of it ground to a halt. Nearly all documents for any purpose were transmitted via the mail. It was the way young men across the country found out they were being summoned to fight a war on the other side of the world.

Instead of firing or arresting the strikers, on March 23 Nixon took the extraordinary step of dispatching 22,000 federal troops to sort and deliver mail in New York City where the

strike was most effective and therefore most crippling to commerce (many stock trades were still formally made via paper mail).

There was just one problem: the GIs didn't know how to sort mail. At the James Farley Post Office across the street from Madison Square Garden, professional postal workers sorted 40 to 60 letters a minute into pigeonholes based on rote memorization of delivery points while gabbing about the Knicks or whatever else was on their minds that day. Needless to say, the soldiers didn't have those skills. "Don't worry, we're not really helping anything," one called out to picketing workers as he got bused away from the post office back to barracks.

The strike ended after eight days, partly because union leadership exaggerated the terms of a "deal" they struck with the Nixon administration but largely because it was losing steam around the country. After all, the strike was never organized. It spread through media reports, not official union channels, and captured a widespread sentiment that enough was enough. But with the administration getting more and more desperate for mail service to return, something had to give, and postal workers preferred it not to be their jobs or freedom.

In the end, everyone got what they wanted. Postal workers ultimately won a 14 percent wage increase, substantially higher than the 5.4 percent Rademacher agreed to in 1969, and they would only need eight years to reach the highest pay scale rather than the previous two decades. Plus, the unions got collective bargaining rights for future contracts, something they didn't have before. But Nixon also got his corporatization of the post office, which became the United States Postal Service, the arrangement we have today.

Although everyone got what they wanted, little has changed. The USPS, as we all know, is still constantly accused of being a wasteful, inefficient bureaucracy with unsustainable finances and a boatload of debt. And many postal workers are still making poverty wages. As labor attorney Jules Bernstein noted on the strike's 50th anniversary back in March, entry level postal workers aren't doing any better than their predecessors half a century ago. Entry level for a city carrier starts around \$36,000, about \$6,000 less than their counterparts from the late 1960s in inflation-adjusted dollars.

This is far from the last time I'll be talking about the strike, the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970 which codified these changes, and the impact they had on the post office we know today. But I wanted to highlight the strike now, because there has been so much talk lately about what wildcat strikes really accomplish and if they are the best way to accomplish it.

No question, there are many differences between the 2020 sports strikes and the 1970 postal worker strike. But I see a lot of similarities, too. Both started with one "local" and spread through word-of-mouth and media reports across the country, not through organized union action but out of righteous anger about a broken social contract. And in both instances, the strike itself is neither the beginning nor the end, but a culmination of feeling nothing else has worked and the demand that the status quo cannot continue. It can go in any direction from here. 

(“The Mail” is Motherboard’s weekly pop-up newsletter about the United States Postal Service, with great insights into the current and historical context of the post office. Read more at <https://themail.substack.com>. - Ed.)





IN MEMORIAM

Angela Frank
Whitemud South

THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

THE DONATION DRIVE FOR JESSIE'S HOUSE WAS A SUCCESS!



Tables in the Union Office were piled with donations of clothing, toiletries and other needed items that totalled 14 large full bags, and 6 large boxes of diapers. In addition, people donated \$270.00 plus a \$250.00 donation from the Human Rights Committee. A big thank you to our Health and Safety Officer, Rashpal Sehmbly, for cataloguing the donations to report to our national office about our efforts.

The Jessie's House Donation Drive and the Food Bank drive are our Local's response to the Edmonton District Labour Council's Workers Helping Workers campaign. Under Bill 32, passed by the UCP government, charitable activities done by unions may not be considered "essential union activities" and might not be allowed in the near future. The EDLC campaign is a way of showing that unions engage in many different charitable activities that benefit the communities in which we live and work. Over the years, postal workers have always shown their generosity by helping with many causes, from Camp Pekikiwin to the Fort McMurray Fires to the Food Bank.

The Jessica Martel foundation is very appreciative of our efforts. I hope that we can make this an annual event with everyone's support. We are also speaking with the foundation about some other, ongoing donation initiatives.

A special thank you to Kathi Gouldie, Karry Biri and Natasha Fryzuk for getting the donation boxes out to the facilities and getting the word out.

Want to find out more about the Jessica Martel Foundation? Go to: jessicamartelmemorialfoundation.com

Thank You Everyone! **Kathleen Mpulubusi**



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VIDEO CONFERENCE

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7TH, 2020

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